The Merchant Venturers of Bristol

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A History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol from its origin to the present day

by Patrick McGrath

The Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol

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To William and Gregory

Contents

Preface ix
List of Illustrations xv
List of abbreviations xvii

Chapter

1. Early Merchant Organisations in Bristol 1
2. The First Fifty Years 10
3. The Seventeenth-Century Background 24
4. Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Seventeenth Century 39
5. The Work of the Society in the Seventeenth Century 49
6. The Eighteenth Century: Bristol's Golden Age 90
7. Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Eighteenth Century 102
8. Overseas Trade in the Eighteenth Century 124
9. The Port, the River and Navigation in the Eighteenth Century 150
10. The Society in Wartime in the Eighteenth Century 170
11. The Society as a Property-Developer in the Eighteenth Century 182
12. Charitable and Educational Work in the Eighteenth Century 197
13. Miscellaneous Activities in the Eighteenth Century 218
14. The Society and Other Organisations in the Eighteenth Century 237
15. The Changing Background in the Nineteenth Century 243
16. Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Nineteenth Century 249
17. The Society and the Trade of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century 284
18. The Port, the River and the Sea in the Nineteenth Century 307
19. The Society as a Property-Developer in the Nineteenth Century 329
20. The Society and Education in the Nineteenth Century 357
21. The Charitable Work of the Society in the Nineteenth Century 388
22. Miscellaneous Activities in the Nineteenth Century 405

23. Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Twentieth Century 442
24. The Society and its Property in the Twentieth Century 466
25. The Society and Education in the Twentieth Century 477
26. The Charitable Work of the Society in the Twentieth Century 513
27. Miscellaneous Activities in the Twentieth Century 529
28. Past, Present and Future 543

Appendix

A. Register of Members 1800–1974 547
B. Table of Admissions 1800–1899 566
C. Table of Admissions 1900–1974 567
D. Masters and Wardens since 1900 568
E. Treasurers since 1900 573
F. Receipts and Payments 1845–1850 574

Index 576

Preface

THE words Merchant Adventurer or Merchant Venturer often conjure up images of courageous and enterprising men risking their lives and their fortunes and braving the perils of the sea to open up new trade routes to distant lands for the benefit of their country. The use of the word "venture" in the sense of running a risk goes far back into the middle ages, but it is not until the second half of the fifteenth century that we find references to merchant adventurers and merchant venturers. From that time onwards the terms came into common use with special reference to certain groups of merchants trading overseas. The most important of such groups was the one trading to the Netherlands, which came to be known as the Company of Merchant Adventurers of England and which, it has been said, adopted the title of Merchant Adventurers at a time when its members had ceased to be adventurers and were settling down to a well-ordered trade in an established market.[1]

In the middle ages and in the sixteenth century, there were established in various provincial towns a number of groups of Merchant Adventurers some of which had a loose relationship with the Merchant Adventurers of England. The Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers, however, was in no sense a branch of a national organisation.[2] It was formally established in 1552 when it was granted letters patent by Edward VI. For more than two hundred years, it used the name Merchant Adventurer as well as the title Merchant Venturer, and it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that it began consistently to call itself the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol. It was in origin a group of merchants which sought to establish for its members the sole right to handle the foreign trade of Bristol. It eventually failed in its attempt to create a monopoly, but it nevertheless developed into a powerful pressure-group which could claim with some justification to speak on behalf of the merchant community. It also engaged in many other activities, the nature of which is examined in this book.

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[1] For a discussion of the use of the terms merchant adventurer and merchant venturer, see E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, 1954, pp. xi ff.

[2] For a discussion of the relationships between the various groups of Merchant Adventurers, see Patrick McGrath, *Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, Bristol Record Society xvii, 1951, pp. xxx ff.

In the course of four centuries, the Society has undergone many changes, but a measure of continuity has been preserved. The Tudor predecessors of the present members were familiar with the first charter which now adorns the new Merchants' Hall, with the elaborate coat of arms still in use, and with the charitable and educational purposes which have become the main activity of the Society. They would find the site of their ancient Hall now occupied by a multi-story building, but adjoining it, they would see a Merchants' Almshouse on the same ground which it occupied in the sixteenth century.

The purpose of this book is to examine the history of the Merchant Venturers of Bristol as a corporate body and not the individual achievements of its members. From 1618 onwards, we have a complete list of Merchant Venturers showing that over 1,200 men have belonged to the Society between that date and the present day. It would not be possible within the limits of this book to examine the work of so many men, and such a study might in any case be misleading. The actions and the views of individual Merchant Venturers did not necessarily represent those of the Society as a corporate body, and it is a mistake to imagine that when a member adopted a particular view on local or national affairs, he did so because he was a member of the Society. Obviously, at certain times and on certain issues, members acted together, but it is wrong to think that throughout its history the Society had a party line which had to be followed by all its members. Merchant Venturers often belonged to other groups, and it is dangerous to look for the Hidden Hand of the Society when discussing the motives of individual members.

This history of the Society cannot, of course, be studied in complete isolation from the background of local and national affairs. It is not possible here to deal with this in great detail or to make a comparative study of Bristol and other towns, but some attention has been given to the city in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for in those centuries the Society had a particularly important part to play in economic life. The background of the later period has been touched on more lightly, because the Society was changing its role and was ceasing to be an influential commercial group. Developments in local and central government compelled it to give up its older functions, and it concentrated increasingly on philanthropic and educational work.

It would be easy to select some of the more interesting and colourful episodes in the Society's history and to concentrate primarily on them, but it would be misleading. Television programmes about Bristol rarely resist the temptation to highlight Cabot and the New World and to give the impression that the wealth of Bristol and the Merchant Venturers was based above all upon the slave trade. The Merchants' Almshouse and the Suspension Bridge are thrown in for full measure. In fact, a great deal of the Society's history consists in continuous and steady application by its members to a great variety of business, important and unimportant. The main record of these multifarious activities is to be found in the 41 Hall Books of Proceedings, the majority of which contain between 400 and 500 pages. In addition, there is a formidable collection of other material. In order to show how the Society worked and what it achieved, it is necessary to include a considerable amount of detail. Some of this will be of interest primarily to present and future members of the Society and to those who have a special concern with the history of Bristol, and some to those who wish to know more about particular aspects of the Society's activities such as its commercial policy, its regulation of the port and the pilots, its property development, its philanthropic work or its contribution to education. Not all the detail will be equally interesting to all readers, but taken as a whole it presents a picture of the work done by many men over a period of more than four hundred years. If the work of the Society was not always glamorous, it was certainly impressive in its amount.

I have tried to present a balanced and critical account of the Society's achievements. Some of these really require more detailed examination than is possible here. It is not easy, for example, to present a coherent account of the finances, and this is a subject which would repay further study, as would the interesting story of how the Society has administered the endowments of the St. Monica Home of Rest and acquired for the trust very extensive agricultural and urban estates. Again, it has been possible to sketch only in outline what has hitherto received little attention – the role of the Society as a property-developer in Clifton, Hotwells and other parts of Bristol, and it is to be hoped that some day this subject will be examined in detail with the help of the great collection of deeds, plans and other material in the Society's archives.

The main groups of records relating to the history of the Merchant Venturers up to the end of the eighteenth century have been described elsewhere.[3] I originally intended to give some account of the later records, but this is unnecessary now that Miss Elizabeth Ralph is engaged in the work of rearranging them in archive groups and preparing lists and calendars which will be of great help to students. It is to be hoped that she will in due course produce a complete

[3] Patrick McGrath, *Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xvii, 1951, pp. xlv ff.; Walter Minchinton, *Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xxiii, 1963, pp. xxxvi ff.

Guide. The references I have given in the footnotes will, I trust, be sufficient to identify the material, even when it has been reorganised and rearranged.

I should like to express my gratitude to those who have helped me in this work and made possible the production of this volume.

I deeply regret that Mr. R. H. Brown who first invited me to write this work and who had a deep interest in the history of the Society did not live to see the completion of the book, although he read the greater part of it in manuscript and made a number of very helpful comments and criticisms.

The Society and its sub-committee, including the present Master Mr. H. A. Densham, Mr. J. A. Gordon, Mr. C. E. Pitman and the Treasurer, have shown great patience and understanding as well as much ingenuity in overcoming the problems of publishing so large a book at a time when printing costs continue to rise dramatically.

The present Treasurer, Mr. J. E. C. Clarke, has given me the benefit of his great knowledge of the Society's affairs and allowed me to take up a great deal of his time.

One of the most remarkable personalities connected with the Society in modern times is Miss G. E. Whitaker who for nearly thirty years was intimately concerned with all aspects of its work. I am deeply grateful to her for making available her knowledge and experience and for preserving me from many errors.

When I first undertook this work, Dr. Helen Meller kindly agreed to examine the archives and to draw up a working list of the materials. Since then, Miss Elizabeth Ralph, the former Bristol City Archivist, has become part-time archivist to the Society and is still engaged in the formidable task of listing and calendaring the records. I should like to thank her for helping me on a number of matters and for reading the whole of the manuscript.

I should also like to express my appreciation of the work of Mr. D. J. Eames whose very valuable thesis on the educational work of the Society has been of the greatest help.

Miss Mary Williams, the Bristol City Archivist, has very kindly assisted in a number of ways.

Professor Kenneth Ingham gave me great help and encouragement, and I very much appreciate all that he has done. Mr. C. E. Pitman generously contributed his expertise as well as his energy and his enthusiasm to arranging for the production and distribution of the book, and to him also I am deeply grateful.

Generous grants to assist publication were received from the Publications Committee of the University of Bristol, Lord Dulverton and the Dulverton Trust, and the Twenty Seven Foundation.

A number of people were involved in the task of typing and retyping the manuscript. I should like to thank above all Mrs. Peggy Roberts who bore the main burden so patiently and who dealt with such understanding and efficiency with the various problems arising in connection with it. I am also very grateful for the help given during the last year by Miss Elizabeth Reid. Mrs. Rosalind Edbrook, Mrs. Margaret Battson and Mrs. Jane Woolrich also helped type part of the manuscript.

I very much appreciate the kindness and help I have received from members of the staff of the Merchants' Hall, particularly Miss Mary Morris and Mr. K. H. Trigg. Mr. H. Kilkenny, Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Moon and Mrs. F. M. Douglas have looked after my comfort during the many hours I have spent working on the records.

Mrs. P. H. Brewer helped in a number of ways, including the selection of the illustrations. Mr. H. Kelsey of the University's Arts Faculty Photographic Unit took a great deal of trouble over photographing material in the Merchants' Hall, and Mr. Reece Winstone allowed me to use some of the illustrations in his unique collection.

Printers do not always receive the gratitude they deserve, and I should like to express my thanks to Mr. C. D. Holmes of Western Printing Services Ltd. for all the trouble he and his staff have taken over the production of this book.

I have tried to acknowledge fully in the footnotes the use I have made of the work of others. Any one who writes about Bristol owes a great deal to the labours of John Latimer, who knew so much about the city's history and who was the first historian of the Society. Unfortunately, he chose not to give footnote references, and it is partly because this presents difficulties to those who come after him that I have been at pains to avoid his mistake. I have made great use of the work of Professor W. E. Minchinton on eighteenth-century Bristol and of Mr. D. J. Eames' thesis on the Society's educational achievements, even though I have consulted at first-hand many of the records which they used.

I am particularly grateful to my daughters, Mrs. Antonia Parker-Jones, who assisted with the proof-reading, and Veronica, who made a major contribution to the task of compiling the index.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation of the help given by my wife and children who have assisted in so many ways in the completion of this book.

Patrick McGrath
May 1975

List of Illustrations

facing page

Prospect of Bristol, 1673 14
The Severn and the Avon, 1673 14
The Charter of 1552 15
The Merchants' Hall, 1673 46
The Merchants' Hall, 1789 46
The Great House, St. Augustine's Back 47
Colston's School at the present day 47
The Hotwell House in the eighteen-thirties 270
The Hotwell House in the eighteen-sixties 270
The Manor of Clifton c.1837 *between pages* 270–271
The Waterworks Engine House 271
The Observatory in the eighteen-fifties 271
William Claxton, Treasurer 1841–1873 334
Menu for a Hall dinner, 1888 335
The silver chargers presented by the first Lord Dulverton. Box in which the Freedom was presented to P. W. S. Miles 335
Portrait of Lord Roberts being removed from the damaged Hall 366
The St. Monica Home of Rest 367
The Merchants' Almshouse 367
The Merchant Venturers' Technical College after the fire of 1906 494
The Merchant Venturers' Technical College after rebuilding, 1909 494
Evening classes in the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, 1885 495
Cartoon lampooning the Society's attitude to the proposed University of Bristol 526
The Merchants' Hall, Clifton, 1966 527
Part of the interior of the Merchants' Hall 527

Abbreviations used in the Footnotes

Book of Charters 1	Book beginning in 1618 containing charters and miscellaneous material.
Book of Charters 2	Book beginning in 1639 and continuing to the mid-eighteenth century, contains copies of charters and miscellaneous material.
Book of Petitions	Book similar to *Book of Charters 2* covering the years 1765–1850.
Book of Trade	Letter and memorandum book in the Merchants' Hall archives covering the period 1598–1666. (see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. xlviii ff.)
Claxton's Journal	Private journal kept by the Treasurer, William Claxton, 2 vols. in the Society's archives.
H.B.	*Merchants' Hall Book of Proceedings* containing the Minutes of Hall meetings and Standing Committee meetings, 41 vols. 1639 to the present day.
Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*	John Latimer, *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol*, Bristol, 1903
Latimer, *Seventeenth Century Annals*	John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, Bristol, 1900.
Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*	John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol, 1893.
Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*	John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century*, Bristol, 1887, and *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century 1887–1900*, Bristol, 1902.
McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*	Patrick McGrath, *Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xvii, 1951.
M.V. University Papers	Collection of miscellaneous papers relating to the Merchant Venturers' Technical

	College and University College, Bristol. Originally kept in two black boxes.
Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*	Walter Minchinton, *The Trade of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xx, 1957.
Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*	Walter Minchinton, *Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xxiii, 1963.
Schedule of Deeds No. 2	A volume of 872 pages entitled 'Schedule of Deeds relating to the Society of Merchants Property' begun in the eighteen-thirties and continuing into the twentieth century with references to the boxes in which the deeds are kept. I have called it No. 2 to distinguish it from the earlier eighteenth-century schedule.
Trans. B.G.A.S.	*Transaction of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society.*
Waterworks Box	Collection of miscellaneous papers in the Society's archives relating to the Waterworks scheme, originally kept in a black box marked "Waterworks".

CHAPTER 1

Early Merchant Organisations in Bristol: a Problem of Evidence

THE Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol was incorporated by letters patent of Edward VI on 18 December 1552, but the merchant organisation then established by royal authority was certainly not the first organisation of merchants to be established in the city. Not surprisingly, attempts have been made to suggest that the Society was no mere Tudor *parvenu*, that it had a respectable ancestry going far back into the middle ages, and that it was possibly flourishing in the later fifteenth century when bold adventurers from Bristol pushed out further and further into the Atlantic and the famous, if somewhat elusive, John Cabot came to the city to find moral and financial support for his voyages of discovery to the New World. In the introductory chapter to his *History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol,*[1] John Latimer hints rather vaguely at some sort of connection between the Society and the Gild Merchant of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but he was too good an historian to commit himself in this matter, and his readers have to draw their own conclusions as they peer through the smokescreen which he created in his section on "The Guild Merchant and its developments". In this search for ancestors, it is necessary to remember that the evidence is limited and difficult to interpret. There are no records of the Society of Merchant Venturers before the mid-sixteenth century, and even in the Elizabethan period the material is pitifully limited. The municipal records are more plentiful, but there are many gaps. Time and again, absence of evidence makes it difficult to say what relationship, if any, existed between one merchant organisation and another, and it is quite impossible to show any continuity between the Society established in 1552 and what Latimer called "the Anterior Merchants' Guilds".

The overseas trade of Bristol has, of course, a very long history.[2] Information about it accumulates as the thirteenth century goes on, but it is not until after the mid-fourteenth century that we have much statistical material.[3] There is uncertainty about the size of the population, and estimates, based on the Poll Tax returns of 1377, vary from 9,500 to 12,000.[4] There is no means of saying how many of these people were engaged in industry, how many in providing services of various kinds and how many in overseas trade, but clearly foreign commerce, particularly in cloth, wine and woad was of major importance in the economy. Between September 1479 and July 1480, for example, some 250 individuals are recorded as trading with Gascony, Spain and Portugal alone.[5] If one takes into account the other foreign markets with which Bristolians dealt, the total number involved must have been very impressive. Many of these people were not, of course, full-time merchants, for there seems to have been nothing to stop any burgess who wished to do so from engaging in an occasional venture overseas, but there is plenty of evidence to show that there was a group of wealthy men whose main business was import and export. These professional merchants played a predominant part in governing the city, and they used some of their wealth for the enrichment of the churches, for the endowment of chantries and for charitable activities of many kinds.[6]

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[1] John Latimer, *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol, with some Account of the Anterior Merchants' Guilds*, Bristol, 1903.

[2] There is an excellent summary of the present state of knowledge in J. Sherborne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1965 (2nd. ed. 1971).

It is probably a mistake to think of the merchant community becoming continually richer and more important throughout the middle ages, for the evidence shows that for much of the fifteenth century the volume of trade in cloth and wine was smaller than in the second half of the fourteenth century,[7] but although Bristol's relative importance in foreign trade seems to have been declining, the merchants engaged in foreign trade appear to have been throughout the middle ages the richest and most powerful group in the community.

Since foreign trade was so important and since those engaged in it were some of the most influential men in the city, one might have expected them to have had from an early date some organisation of their own to look after their particular interests. There is a mass of evidence about the numerous craft gilds of medieval Bristol,[8] and it would seem only natural for the merchants to meet and make regulations in the same way as did the weavers, the butchers, the dyers and the rest of the specialised crafts. Most of the craft gilds placed restrictions on entry to their mystery and insisted on apprenticeship, or at least official approval by the gild, before a man could be enrolled and permitted to practice his trade. The aim of such regulations was partly to ensure reasonable professional standards, partly to prevent occupations becoming overcrowded, with the consequent reduction of the price at which the product or service could be sold. There would seem to be every reason why the most important occupation of all – the craft or mystery of a merchant – should be organised on similar lines and why an attempt should be made to restrict entry and to maintain professional standards in an occupation the practice of which would affect the reputation of Bristol in other English towns and in countries beyond the seas.

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[3] E. M. Carus-Wilson and Olive Coleman, *England's Export Trade 1275–1547*, 1963.

[4] J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population*, 1948, p. 285; E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Expansion of Exeter at the close of the Middle Ages*, 1963, p. 5.

[5] J. Sherborne, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[6] A great deal of information about the merchant community of medieval Bristol is to be found in the work of Professor E. M. Carus-Wilson including the following: *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages*, Bristol Record Society, vii, 1937; *The Merchant Adventurers of Bristol in the Fifteenth Century*, reprinted from *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1928, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1962; and her chapter on "The Overseas Trade of Bristol" printed in her *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, 1954 and in E. Power and M. M. Postan, *Studies in English Trade in the 15th Century*, 1933.

[7] See J. Sherborne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages*, which modifies very considerably earlier views about the position of Bristol in the fifteenth century.

Some writers have suggested that an archetypal organisation of merchants can be found in the *gilda mercatoria* or Gild Merchant which flourished in a great many English towns from the twelfth century onwards.[9] In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there are a few references to a Gild Merchant in Bristol, but in medieval England a gild merchant was not necessarily, or even normally, a gild of merchants in the sense of being an association concerned only with those engaged in overseas trade. Generally speaking, it was an association concerned with controlling the whole of the economic life of the town and preventing outsiders from enjoying the privileges which were restricted to burgesses. Retailers and craftsmen probably constituted the bulk of its members. It was a Gild Merchant but not a gild of merchants in the modern sense. Very little is known about the organisation and working of the Gild Merchant in Bristol, and there is no mention of it in the records after 1372. Continuity with later organisations of merchants cannot be established.

Another organisation involving merchants was the Staple.[10] This was primarily a royal institution to control the export of wool, hides and lead. From time to time in the fourteenth century, the government directed that such exports should be channelled through specified towns in England instead of through marts overseas. Thus, the important Statute of the Staple of 1353 removed the staple from

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[8] F. Rogers, "The Bristol Craft Gilds during the 16th and 17th centuries", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis, 1949; *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, edit. Francis B. Bickley, 2 vols. 1900.

[9] For the history of the Gild Merchant, see Charles Gross, *The Gild Merchant*, 2 vols., 1890.

[10] For the complicated history of the Staple, see *The Staple Court Books of Bristol*, edit. E. E. Rich, Bristol Record Society, v, 1934, and in particular his section on "Bristol as a Staple", pp. 64 ff.

Bruges to home staples in thirteen towns, of which Bristol was one, and directed that the merchants, "native and alien", should meet annually and elect a Mayor of the Staple and two constables in each of the staple towns. The Mayor and constables were given certain jurisdiction over members of the Staple and were to judge cases by the Law Merchant and not by the common law.[11] In 1363, Calais was fixed as the sole staple mart and a small group of important wool merchants became the Staple Company of England. This company was primarily concerned with the export of English wool, and largely because Bristol lay off the main trade routes to the Netherlands and Italy, its export of wool was of comparatively small importance. Thus, it was not very much concerned with the operation of this powerful company. Nevertheless, the local staple organisation which had been set up in 1353 continued, and a Mayor of the Bristol Staple was elected and continued to hold a court until the later seventeenth century. From 1379 onwards the Mayor of the Staple was always the Mayor of Bristol.[12] In 1436 when John Milton, Mayor of Bristol and Mayor of the Staple, died in office, the constables of the Staple and "the commonalty of the merchants both native and foreign of the aforesaid staple" elected Nicholas Devenyshe to be Mayor of the Staple for the rest of the year and got the election confirmed by the Lord Chancellor.[13]

Very little is known about the way in which the staple organisation worked in medieval Bristol and all the evidence points to it being, not an association concerned with regulating foreign trade, but a body whose main function was the administration of a particular kind of justice in mercantile affairs for a privileged community of members. We have no lists of members and we do not know how membership was obtained. It was a body which was distinct from the town government but very closely associated with it, since the Mayor of Bristol was Mayor of the Staple. It seems likely that the leading merchants of Bristol were members, but there is no evidence that it was limited to them. They presumably met together as members of the staple just as they did as members of the city government, but there is nothing to suggest that they used this institution to regulate foreign trade and there is no link between the Staple and the Society of Merchant Venturers.[14]

Whatever may have been the position earlier, control of the overseas trade of Bristol was for the greater part of the fifteenth century in the hands of the city government and not in the hands of a special association of merchants. The Corporation exercised control directly through its ordinances,[15] although this did not mean that groups of merchants with similar interests could not cooperate from time to time to urge the Common Council to adopt a particular policy.[16] As long as the merchants controlled the municipal government, which had in any case the last word in deciding economic policy, it was not essential for them to have their own organisation, and they might well have felt that they could better achieve their objectives through the Common Council.

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[11] For reasons which need not be discussed here, merchants and others found it much more convenient to have their disputes settled by the Law Merchant.

[12] E. E. Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[13] *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, edit. Francis B. Bickley, i, 178 ff.

[14] The Staple continued to exist long after the Society of Merchant Venturers had been established, but there were no links because the two institutions served entirely different purposes.

In 1467 there seems to have been a change of policy by the city government, and the Corporation took the first very halting step towards giving the merchants an organisation of their own. An act "for the goode sadde and profitable rewle off and uppon iiii certeigne merchaundiszes usyd in Bristowe that is to sey meteoyle, woloyle, yren and wax" laid down that the mayor and sheriff should summon a great council and with their advice choose a worshipful man of the council who had served as mayor or sheriff to be master of the fellowship of merchants within the town for a year and also eleven other merchants to be wardens and two to be beadles. The Master and fellowship were to occupy a chapel and room in Spicer's Hall on the Back of Bristol for a rent of 20s. per annum. All the merchants of Bristol were to come when summoned to the meeting place under pain of forefeiting 1 lb. of wax for every default. The fellowship was to regulate the price at which the four commodities were to be sold by burgesses to strangers. Those who did not observe the price regulations were to pay a fine of 20s. for every offence, half to the Fellowship, half to the Corporation. If a merchant was forced by necessity to sell any of the four named commodities (and might presumably be tempted to sell under the fixed price), he was to explain his difficulty to the wardens or beadles. If they could not provide a remedy within three days, he was free to sell at his pleasure.[17]

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[15] See, for example, the ordinances concerning woad, *Little Red Book*, ii, 16–22; ordinances concerning drapers, *ibid.*, 51–5; ordinances concerning non-freemen bringing wool, cloth, iron, woad, wine, salt, madder, grain, oil, wax etc. to Spicer's Hall, *Great Red Book of Bristol*, edit. E. W. W. Veale, Bristol Record Society, 1937, viii, 57–8.

[16] The ordinances concerning drapers, 1370, list a large number of merchants and drapers by whose consent the ordinances were made (*Little Red Book of Bristol*, ii, 51–4); and the ordinances concerning woad, 1477, were made after a petition had been received from "the merchants adventures with other Byers and sillers" had complained about abuses (*Great Red Book of Bristol*, edit. E. W. W. Veale, Bristol Record Society, xvi, 120).

[17] The act is printed in *Great Red Book of Bristol*, edit. E. W. W. Veale, Bristol Record Society, xvi, 83–4, and in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 16–18. In the former the word yren (iron) is wrongly transcribed as tren.

The Act of 1467 did not mean that the Corporation of Bristol gave the merchants of Bristol the right to run their own affairs. It merely delegated to a small body of officials chosen annually by itself the right to summon other merchants and control the price at which certain commodities could be sold to non-burgesses, and it laid down the penalties for non-cooperation. The large body of people engaged in foreign trade had no say in electing the officials and were not given any powers by the act. They were consulted but they were not given control.

We do not know the background of this Act and why only these four commodities were controlled. It is possible that in a time of trade depression the Corporation decided to tighten up the regulations concerning non-burgesses in order to ensure that outsiders did not benefit at the expense of Bristolians.[18] It may have thought that the best way of doing this was to appoint a special body of merchants who would have a particular interest in enforcing the Act.

There is no evidence that the arrangements made in 1467 ever came into operation. Latimer with less than his usual good sense committed himself to the statement that the Fellowship "undoubtedly flourished" and added that "a deed preserved in the Merchants' Hall seems to show that the chapel in Spicer's Hall was soon deemed inadequate for its requirements".[19] This picture of a growing body of merchants requiring more room for religious observances is not supported by the evidence, for the document to which Latimer referred made provision for a new chapel, not for the Fellowship of Merchants of 1467, but for a Gild of Mariners established in 1445.[20] It may be that the Fellowship of Merchants of 1467 was still-born. If Common Council did in fact choose the Master and other officials between 1467 and 1499, we have no record of it doing so.

There is one piece of evidence that could possibly be used to support the view that after 1467 the merchants had some kind of organisation. In 1477, there was a petition to the Common Council about the state of the Toulouse woad trade. This came from "your moost pore Comburgensis the merchaunts adventures [*sic*] with

[18] For the trade depression of these years, see J. W. Sherborne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages*, pp. 21–2.

[19] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 18–21.

[20] This is clear from the deed which Latimer reproduced. The Gild of Mariners was established in 1445 under the patronage of Our Lady, St. Clement, St. George and all the saints. A priest and 12 poor mariners were to pray for the welfare of the royal family, the corporation and the merchants and mariners of Bristol. They were to be placed in the hospital of St. Bartholomew and were to be supported by a levy on goods and mariners' wages (*Little Red Book of Bristol*, edit. Francis B. Bickley, ii, 186 ff). By the deed of 1493, reproduced in Latimer, the Corporation granted to 13 merchants and 12 mariners a piece of land in the Marsh to build a chapel in honour of St. Clement.

others Byers and sillers of the Towne of Bristowe. . . ."[21] It is of interest not only because it seems to be the first time that the term "merchaunts adventures" was used in Bristol, but because it appears to make a distinction between them and "others Byers and sillers". It would, however, be dangerous to assert that it shows the existence of an organised merchant group. The "merchaunts adventures" may simply have been those who specialised in overseas trade in woad as distinct from retailers and others who sometimes bought and sold the commodity.

The balance of probability, then, is that after passing the Act of 1467, the Common Council decided not to implement it and continued to regulate foreign trade directly and not through a body with delegated powers.

It is not until 1500 that we find the Corporation establishing an organisation which can be said in any way to resemble the Society of Merchant Venturers incorporated in 1552. In that year it decided that in order to prevent "dyvers colourable and crafty dealinge of certeyn burgeises" who broke the regulations about dealing with foreigners and strangers (i.e. non-burgesses), there should be established "a company or fellowship of merchauntes separate and distincte from every other companyes of handecraftymen". The Act nominated the first master (John Penke), the first wardens (David Leyson and John Stokes) and the first beadles or brokers (George Meke and William Gifford). In future, the Company was to meet yearly, within fourteen days after the feast of St. Michael, to elect its own officers. Sons and apprentices of members were to be admitted without fine provided they were burgesses, but those who were burgesses by redemption or marriage were to pay an admission fine. The Master and wardens were to meet twice a week in the Council House to discuss the merchants' business and to settle disputes. The Company could make ordinances for the good rule of the fellowship, and those who disobeyed them could be fined. No merchant of Bristol might freight any ship without permission from the Master and wardens. When any ship arrived with merchandise of strangers or aliens, the Company was to decide what was to be done with the cargo. A tax of a penny a ton on all merchandise and a halfpenny a ton on salt was to be levied for the use of the Company. By these and other ordinances the Common Council gave the Company complete control over the foreign trade of the city.[22]

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[21] *The Great Red Book of Bristol* (*Text, Part III*), edit. E. W. W. Veale, Bristol Record Society, xvi, 1950, pp. 120–2.

[22] A copy of these very lengthy ordinances is preserved in the Merchants' Hall. The ordinances were printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 26–35. It is possible here to mention only a few of the very detailed regulations. The ordinances were said to be for the good of "the said marchaunts adventurers".

Once again, we are ignorant of the motives which led Common Council to take the unprecedented step of establishing a separate organisation for the merchants and giving it such wide powers over foreign trade. The overseas trade of Bristol had been flourishing in the last twenty years of the fifteenth century, and the merchants may have decided that they needed an organisation of their own.[23] Possibly they thought that too many amateurs were taking advantage of a booming trade to dabble in what they regarded as their business, but this is speculation. We do not know why this decision was made at this particular time.

The Act of 1500, like that of 1467, is followed by a baffling silence in the records. There is no evidence that the Fellowship established in 1500 did in fact go on. If it made any ordinances, they have not survived, and we have no record of the names of any masters and wardens elected under the Act. This silence is all the more surprising because one would have expected that the merchants of Bristol, who had at long last got an organisation of their own, would have wanted to keep it in being. The Act gave them very extensive privileges and one would not have expected them to allow their privileges to lapse through disuse.

The fact that in its organisation and powers the Company of Merchants established in 1500 bears such a marked resemblance to the Society of Merchant Venturers incorporated in 1552 makes one wonder whether there was not some kind of continuity, but it is difficult to believe that such an organisation could have existed for fifty years and left no trace at all in the records. One of the puzzling aspects of the problem is that the only known copy of the Act of Common Council of 1500 is found, not in the city archives, where one would expect it to be, but in the archives of the Merchant Venturers. It may be that in the mid-sixteenth century when a number of Bristol merchants decided to ask the crown for incorporation, they got hold of the Act of 1500 with a view to modelling their proposed new organisation upon it. But this is speculation. Those who asked for a charter in 1552 did not, as far as we know, mention that there had been an earlier organisation in Bristol and seem to start, as it were, from scratch. If they knew of the earlier organisation, they may not have been anxious to mention it in their application to the crown, since they wanted to get their authority not, as in 1500, from the Corporation but direct from the King.

From what has been said it should be clear that it is impossible to show any direct connection between the Society of Merchant

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[23] See J. Sherborne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages*, pp. 22–3. As far as the cloth trade was concerned, Mr. Sherborne points out that the 1490s was the most successful decade between 1347 and 1547, and Bristol was shipping 24 per cent of the national import of non-sweet wines.

Venturers established under Edward VI and earlier merchant organisations. In the light of the evidence at present available, any attempt to trace the history of the Society back to the middle ages can be regarded only as wishful thinking.[24]

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[24] It is, of course, possible that further evidence may one day come to light about either the organisation of 1500 or the early history of the Society of Merchant Venturers. Latimer believed that the Society's early records were seized by the crown in the 1630s, and the Society has from time to time advertised in the hope that they may be found, but Latimer was, I think, mistaken about what was taken by the crown. For a further discussion of this, see Patrick McGrath, *Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, 1957, vol. xvii, pp. xlv–xlvii..

CHAPTER 2

The First Fifty Years

THE history of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol[1] thus begins with the letters patent granted by Edward VI on 18 December 1552.[2] According to the preamble, this charter was granted in response to "the lamentable petition of Edward Prin, Thomas Hickes, and Robert Butler . . . and other merchaunts adventurers of the Citty aforesaid (called marchant Venterers)" trading beyond the seas.[3] The King stated that he had been given to understand that "divers Artificers and men of manuell arte" not brought up in the merchant's art and not having any knowledge of it were commonly using the trade in strange (foreign) ships, so that goods were illegally exported and the customs defrauded, and these people were behaving in an evil and irregular manner, so that the navy, the mariners and the merchants brought up in trade were in decay. The merchants had petitioned the King for a remedy, and the King therefore decreed that Prin, Hickes and Butler and the other merchant venturers should be incorporated in "one bodye and one Comynaltie Corporated for ever by the name of the Maister, Wardeins and Comynaltie of the merchant venturers of the Citty of Bristol". Prin was appointed Master and Hickes and Thomas wardens. Every year, the members of the newly incorporated body were to choose a master and two wardens who were to have authority over all concerned in the trade and they were to have a common seal. The Master and wardens were to take an oath yearly before the Mayor and aldermen to execute their office, and the Society was to have powers to make ordinances concerning the trade. No artificer of Bristol was to trade beyond the seas unless he had been admitted to the Society, or should hereafter be apprenticed to a merchant, or had used the trade of a merchant for seven years. The ordinances made by the Society must not be to the prejudice of the Crown, the city or the Merchant Adventurers trading to the Netherlands.

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[1] The Society was incorporated in 1552 as the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol (*per nomen Magistri custodum et Communitatis de Marchaunt Venturers civitatis Bristoll*). The grant of arms of 1569 stated that Edward VI incorporated "the company and fellowship of the marchant adventurars". The Society continued to use the style *Merchant Adventurers* throughout the seventeenth century (for one of the rare occasions when it used the title *Merchant Venturers*, see *H.B.1*, p. 164, 7 Aug. 1650. The reversion to the original *Merchant Venturers* seems to have taken place in the 1760s. See McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, xxx, xxxi.

[2] Printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 39–42, with an English translation, pp. 42–6.

[3] This cannot be taken to mean that there already existed a group of merchant venturers in the sense of an organised body. The terms merchant adventurer or merchant venturer was commonly used of any individual who ventured beyond the seas.

The allegations made by those who petitioned for the Charter need not necessarily be taken seriously. That Bristolians who had not been trained as merchants were engaged in overseas trade was certainly true, but that they were acting in the way alleged rests solely on the statement of merchants anxious to secure a monopoly for themselves.

What we do not know is why the merchants chose this particular time to make a bid for a monopoly. It could conceivably have been a response to a trade depression, an attempt to restrict the limited business available to as few people as possible. English foreign trade was in difficulties at the beginning of the fifteen-fifties. London's export of cloth, for example, fell from 132,766 cloths in 1549–50 to 112,710 in 1550–1, and to 84,968 in 1551–2, and this was all the more significant since London controlled between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of the total export of cloth.[4] It does not seem, however, that Bristol merchants were adversely affected by the export crisis which hit the Merchant Adventurers of England who marketed cloths in Antwerp. Bristol's overseas trade was primarily directed to Spain, Portugal, Ireland and France, and although relations between England and Spain were not as happy as they had been earlier in the century,[5] Bristol's cloth exports seem to have nearly doubled between 1549 and 1551,[6] and the city must have been experiencing a boom at a time when London was suffering from a slump. It is possible that a sudden expansion in cloth exports had encouraged a number of people not trained as merchants to try their hand at foreign trade, and that the merchants responded to an unusually large influx of part-timers into foreign trade by demanding a monopoly for the professionals.

The difficulties which the Merchant Adventurers of England trading to Antwerp experienced in the early fifteen-fifties may, however, have had some relevance to the Merchant Venturers' Charter. The crisis may have helped to create in official circles a feeling that foreign trade was best restricted to particular groups of experts. Professor Fisher argued that the first half of the sixteenth century was a period of trade expansion during which the Government placed relatively few restrictions on foreign trade, but that in the second half of the century when foreign trade ran into continual difficulties, there was a much more restrictive policy.[7] From this point of view, the grant to the Merchant Venturers, which was made at a time when London's exports had run into serious difficulties, can be seen as part of the Government's policy in the second half of the century of favouring "a well-ordered trade" limited to privileged groups. It was argued that if any one could trade overseas, too many people would do so, the market would be flooded (as happened in Antwerp in 1550), and English cloth would be left unsold or else sold at greatly reduced prices. Uncontrolled activity in the foreign market would lead to ill-qualified and unscrupulous people snatching quick profits by unsatisfactory commercial practices, thus damaging the reputation of English goods and English merchants. From the Government's point of view, organised groups of privileged merchants could be subjected to pressure to make loans and to assist the Government in various ways in return for their privileges. The practice of giving official approval to restricted groups of merchants was not, of course, new, and the Tudor government had inherited from the middle ages the Company of the Staple and the Merchant Adventurers trading to the Netherlands, but it made much greater use of incorporated and monopolistic trading companies in the second half of the century than ever before, both locally and nationally. The period witnessed the granting of charters to the Muscovy Company, to the Merchant Adventurers of England,[8] to the Eastland Company, to the Levant Company, to the East India Company, to various groups trading to Africa and to groups of merchants in Newcastle, York, Chester, Hull, Exeter and elsewhere.

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[4] J. D. Gould, *The Great Debasement*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 175–6. Professor Gould's new evidence and his critical examination of earlier work on Tudor foreign trade is essential to an understanding of Tudor commercial policy and the effect on exports of the debasement of the coinage.

[5] Gordon Connell-Smith, *Forerunners of Drake*, 1954.

[6] In the period 1540–9, Bristol's average export of cloth was 2,170 cloths per year. In 1549–50, she exported 4,271 cloths, and in 1550–1, 4,253 cloths. The figures for 1551–3 are not known. In 1553–4, they were 3,490 and in 1554–5, 2,342. They were well below 2,000 for the period 1555–61. J. D. Gould, *op. cit.*, Appendix C; E. M. Carus-Wilson and Olive Coleman, *England's Export Trade 1275–1547*.

The right of controlling the overseas trade of Bristol which the Merchant Venturers obtained in 1552 was one which they could have obtained from the Corporation of Bristol, which had in fact given similar powers to the association of merchants which it established in 1500. There is no evidence on the point, but it can be assumed that the Common Council of Bristol supported the application which the merchants made to the Crown. The point of applying to the King was that the members of the newly incorporated body would in future enjoy a monopoly which rested not merely on municipal authority but on royal authority.

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[7] F. J. Fisher, "Commercial Trend and Policy in Sixteenth-Century England", *Economic History Review* x (1940), 95 ff. His interpretation has, however, been questioned. See L. Stone, "State Control in Sixteenth-Century England", *Economic History Review* xvii (1947) 104 ff., and J. D. Gould, *The Great Debasement*, chapter 6 ("Exports and the Debasement").

[8] I have for convenience used the term Merchant Adventurers of England for the group trading in white cloth to the Netherlands and North Germany. This Company was established in the middle ages and acquired further privileges in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The letters patent granted by Edward VI were confirmed by Elizabeth I in 1566,[9] presumably as a result of an initiative taken by the Society. The Elizabethan grant mentioned by name the Master, Thomas Kelke, and the wardens, Dominic Chester and Thomas Alder.

In a period when the authority of Parliament was very much increasing, it was obviously desirable for the monopolists to make doubly sure of their privileges by getting parliamentary confirmation of them.[10] Moreover, it seems likely from what follows that the the charters had not proved entirely satisfactory to the Society of Merchant Venturers. The grant made by Edward VI lay particular stress on excluding from foreign trade "Artificers and men of manuell arte", but the Society probably found in practice that the real threat to its monopoly came not from artificers but from people like the grocers, the mercers, the haberdashers and the vintners. The wealthier members of these crafts traded overseas but also engaged in the retail trade. They were not "mere merchants". From the point of view of the professional merchants it was obviously desirable that they too should be explicitly excluded, and thus in 1566 the Merchant Venturers promoted an Act to confirm (and, in fact, to extend) the privileges granted by charter.[11]

The argument in support of the Act of 1566 is given in the preamble. It was based on the alleged decay of shipping in Bristol and the consequent threat to the navy in time of war – an argument which might be expected to carry weight in the perilous early years of Elizabeth I. It was claimed that in former times the Merchant Venturers provided employment for various trades in Bristol and furnished the navy with as many as twenty-five ships in time of war. Of late years, people who did not possess ships of their own had traded in vessels belonging to foreigners, and as a result merchants were unable to maintain their ships and had to sell them or lay them up, so that there were scarcely five ships available, whereas formerly there had been twenty-five. In order to provide for the continuance of the prosperity of Bristol and the increase of the defence of the realm, and in order to restore the merchant venturers to their former numbers, Edward VI had incorporated them in a Company and Fellowship, and Elizabeth I had confirmed his grant. The Act of Parliament of 1566 approved the incorporation and explicitly stated that "noe Artificers or of anie other Science . . . should exercise the recourse of marchandize into the parts beyond the Seas unless they were admitted into the Societie . . . by the Maister and Wardens . . . or shalbe apprentice to the Saide Misterie or Arte of Marchaunts aforesaid by the space of Seaven yeeres. . . . " Since the letters patent did not prescribe penalties, it was now enacted that offenders should be liable to forfeiture of all the goods they attempted to transport illegally to or from countries beyond the seas. Half the forfeiture was to go to the Queen, half to be divided between the Society and the Corporation of Bristol. Finally, if any member of the Society attempted to use any other trade besides that of a merchant adventurer, the Master and wardens were authorised to expel him.

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[9] 8 July 1566. Printed with translation in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 46, 47.

[10] The Muscovy or Russia Company, which got a charter in 1555, had it confirmed by Act of Parliament in 1566.

[11] The Act is printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 47–50.

The Act of Parliament of 1566 was a remarkable triumph for the full-time professional merchants over the retailers and over those merchants who also engaged in retailing. We can assume that it was achieved with the full support of the Corporation.

It was but fitting that so successful an organisation should apply for a grant of arms, and in 1569 Robert Cooke, Clarencieux King of Arms, duly made a grant so that "suche as have done comendable service to their prince or contry eyther in warre or in peace may bothe receive due honor in their lyves and also deryve the same successively to their posteritie . . .".[12] The grant incidentally mentioned the naming of the Master (Dominic Chester) and of the wardens (Thomas Rowland and John Carr) which would otherwise be unknown to us.

The triumph in the Parliament of 1566 was short-lived. There was apparently a struggle between the professional merchants and the wealthier retailers who did not want to give up retailing but who were determined not to be excluded from foreign trade. The professional merchants may themselves have been divided. The full story of the conflict is not known,[13] but it is significant that the two members of parliament for Bristol in 1566 were not returned in 1571[14] and that the Mayor and aldermen wrote to the Lord Treasurer Burghley on 28 March 1571 claiming that the Act of 1566 had done great damage to the trade of the city.[15]

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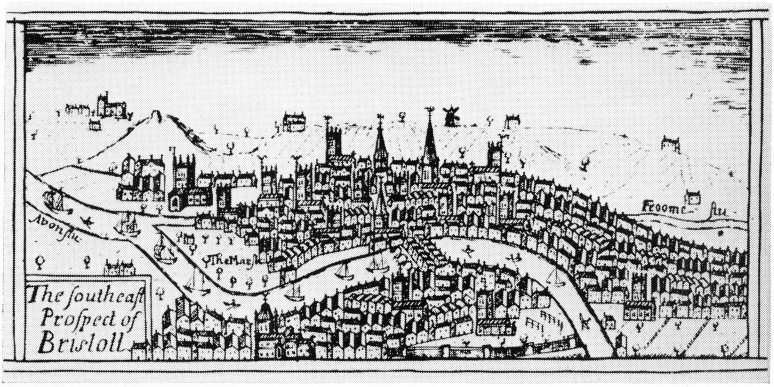
[12] Printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 50–2, with a coloured reproduction of the coat of arms. The motto "indocilis pauperiem pati" from Horace Book 1 Ode 1 did not appear in the original grant and was adopted by the Society during the nineteenth century. It could apply either to individuals who were not prepared to tolerate personal poverty or to the corporate philanthropic efforts of the Society.

[13] See Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 52 ff.; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. xiii and notes 2 and 3.

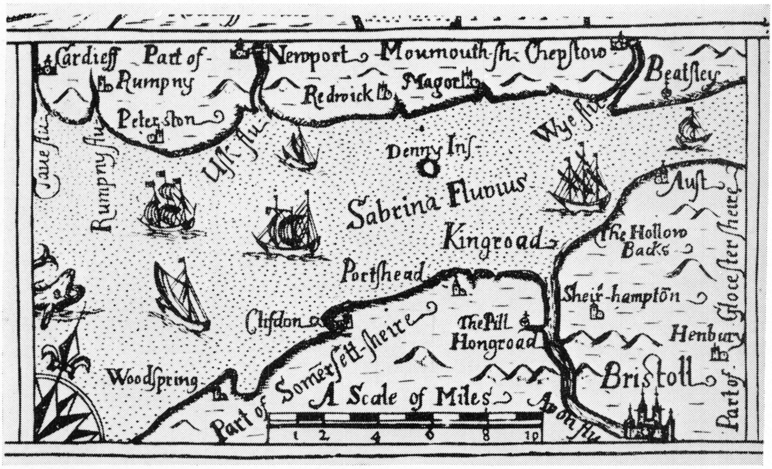
[14] The M.P.s in 1566 were Thomas Chester and William Carr. They were both feoffees for the hall and almshouse (see note 22). In 1571 they were John Popham, Recorder of Bristol, and Philip Langley.

[15] *Cal. S.P.D. 1547–1580*, p. 408.


The ſoutheaſt Proſpect of Briſtoll
Avon flu
The Marſh
Froome flu

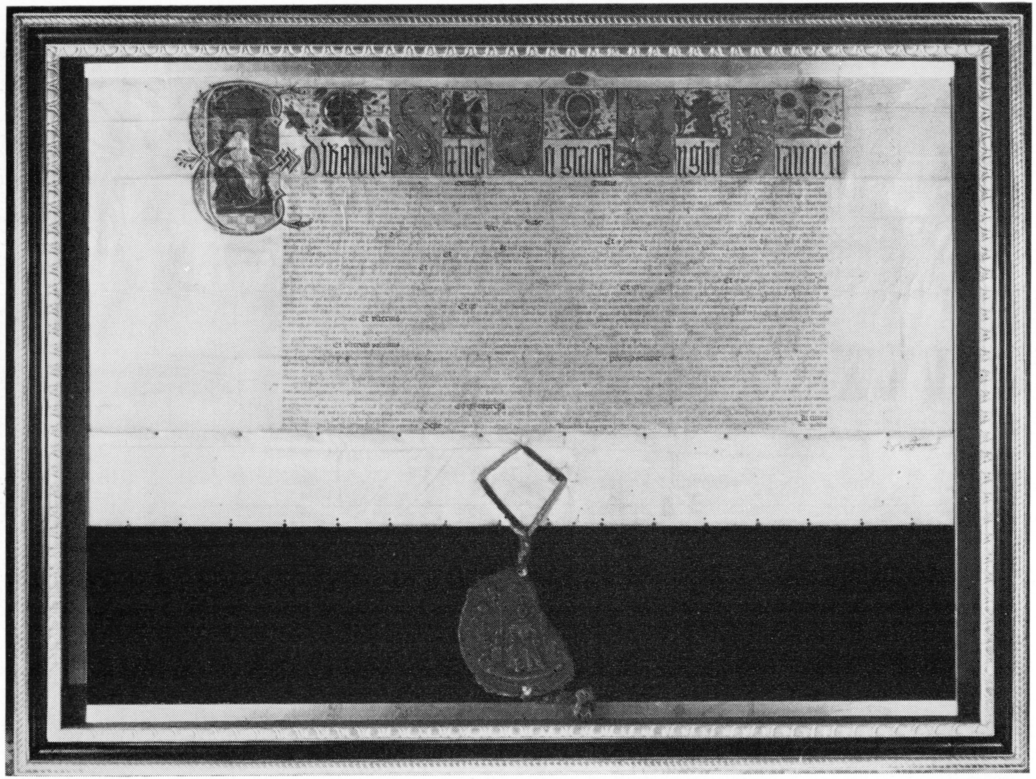
Prospect of Bristol, from James Millerd's Plan of Bristol, 1673.

Photograph by G. Kelsey


Cardieff
Part of Rumpny
Peterston
Newport
Mounmouth sh.
Chepſtow
Redwick
Magor
Beatſley
Taue flu
Rumpny flu
Uſk flu
Denny Inſ.
Wye flu
Sabrina Fluvius
Kingroad
Auſt
The Hollow Backs
Portſhead
Sheir-hampton
Clifdon
The Pill
Hongroad
Henbury
Part of Gloceſter sheire
Woodſpring
Part of Somerſett-sheire
A Scale of Miles
1 2 4 6 8 10
Avon flu
Briſtoll

The Severn and the Avon, from James Millerd's Plan of Bristol, 1673.

Photograph by G. Kelsey



The Charter of 1552, preserved in the Merchants' Hall.

Photograph by G. Kelsey

A bill to repeal the Act of 1566 was introduced, and there was a heated debate over the second reading, "many and sundry long arguments" being advanced on both sides.[16] The question was referred to a committee. The Merchant Venturers argued in answer to criticisms by their opponents that any retailer could be admitted as a merchant provided he agreed to give up retailing; that the prices had not gone up, as was alleged, and that goods were better and cheaper in Bristol than anywhere else in England. Shipping was not in decay, and they had built nine or ten new ships and bought others, so that, in spite of losses, they had twice as many ships now as when their letters patent were granted. They claimed that the revenue from customs had increased and stated that they could prove this from a copy of the books in the customs house. It was not true that poor craftsmen were unemployed and they had, in fact, provided them with more work than ever before.

After dealing with criticisms, the Merchant Venturers went on to argue that if rich retailers such as the grocers, mercers, haberdashers, soapmakers, vintners and others were allowed to trade abroad, they would ruin the poorer members of their own crafts who would be unable to compete with them, and they would destroy the "mere" merchants who had no one else to sell to except retailers. If a large number of people were allowed to trade overseas, it would lower the price of English goods abroad and put up the price of imports, "for the more there are to sell there, the worse market will they make, and the more buyers of strange commodities, the dearer they must be". At the time when the navy was best maintained in Bristol, there were not more than 40 merchants. Now, there were nearly 100, and there were fewer goods available for them to import, since iron and alum, which were formerly brought from Spain, were now made better and cheaper in England. It was injurious for a man who had served seven or eight years' apprenticeship to a merchant to have his living prejudiced by those ignorant of trade "wherein there is more skill than every man judges". A merchant could not be a retailer, for he had not the necessary knowledge, not having served an apprenticeship. In any case, there was no room for him, since "all the houses that stand in place of retail are already in the hands of retailers". No retailer had built ships, but one poor merchant had sustained more loss in the service of the Prince than all the retailers. All the benefits given by Bristolians to the city, such as erection of hospitals, giving out of money for clothmaking and other provision for the poor, had been done by merchants and not by retailers. Finally, it was argued

[16] *Journal of the House of Commons I*, 84, 85, 86. The bill was given a first reading on 10 April. There were many arguments about it on the second reading on 11 April and on the third reading on 28 April. For a full discussion, see Jean Vanes, 'The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century', London Ph.D. thesis, 1975.

that the retailers had never been so well off as now, and the merchants were not only more numerous than ever but had been much impoverished since the last Parliament by the restraint of trade.[17]

Whatever the Merchant Venturers lacked, it was certainly not ability in producing plausible arguments in support of their monopoly, but they failed to convince Parliament, and a bill repealing the Act of 1566 was put on the statute book in May 1571.[18] The preamble put the case against the Merchant Venturers. With references to the Act of 1566, it said that "no manner of benefit or commodytie appeareth to growe by the said Acte to the commonweale" or to Bristol, but, on the contrary, since it had been passed, prices had greatly increased, the customs had decreased, the wealth of the city had been consumed and the navy had in some degree decayed, since many wealthy inhabitants of Bristol who had previously traded on a large scale were now excluded "from the trade of the Seas". Poor craftsmen were not given employment, and Bristol and the surrounding countryside would be greatly damaged if remedy were not provided "and the wonted libertye of the said citizens thereof to trafficcke for merchaundize beyond the Seas fully restored".

The Act of 1571 was a major setback for the Society which could now base its claims to a monopoly only on the support of the letters patent of Edward VI and Elizabeth I and not on the authority of parliament which had explicitly rejected the Society's claim to exclude others from sharing in the foreign trade of the city. It was no longer in a position to impose on interlopers the penalties laid down in the Act of 1566. Moreover, it had for the time being lost the support of the Corporation. It was in a much weaker position than it had been between 1566 and 1571, but it still had its charters, which were not explicitly cancelled by the Act. As we shall see, it did not abandon its claims and it made repeated efforts in the seventeenth century to recover the ground it lost in 1571. The Act of 1571 seems to have been forgotten in later years, and there is no evidence that it was used against the Society's later attempts to assert a monopoly.[19]

Between 1571 and 1605, there seems to be only one reference in

[17] See *Cal. S.P.D. Addenda, 1566–79*, pp. 343–4. This paper giving "Articles of a Bill exhibited in Parliament against the incorporation of the Merchant Adventurers of the city of Bristol, and the answers into the same" (12 April 1571) is printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 53–5.

[18] The Act is printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 55–7.

[19] Latimer (p. 55) expresses surprise that no reference to the Act is made in the corporate records or in the numerous Bristol Calendars, but presumably the Society itself was not anxious to preserve the memory of this major defeat, and when the Society and Corporation once more became partners, the Corporation, too, was anxious to forget it. It seems as though the Act was completely forgotten. In the eighteenth century, when the Standing Committee was looking for precedents, it

the records to the activities of the Society. It appears in an Exchequer warrant issued on 9 February 1573 which states that the Government had been "advertised by the autentike testymoniall from the *Master* and Wardens of the Company of Marchaunt*es* Adventurers of our citie of Bristoll under their seale and hand*es*, that our lovinge subjecte Dominike Chester and his p*ar*teners of the said citye have sithence the moneth of May laste buylded a new shipp of the burden of two hundred tonnes called by the name of the Domynike . . .".[20] Apart from this, there is at present nothing to show that the Society was exercising any of the powers granted in its charters. We do not know the names of any masters or wardens between 1573 and 1605, and there is no evidence that any elections were held or any regulations made.[21] There is at least the possibility that as an organisation the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol had ceased to function.

Even though the full machinery of the Society may have ceased to function, there still remained what might perhaps be called a shadow Society which could preserve something from the wreck and keep it for happier times. Early in its history, the Society had acquired a hall. This was the chapel of St. Clement, which had originally belonged to the Gild of Mariners. When the chantries and other bodies devoted to superstitious purposes had been dissolved under Edward VI, the Gild of Mariners came to an end since its purpose was to maintain a priest and 12 poor mariners to pray for the souls of deceased merchants and sailors. The property of the gild was granted by the King to Sir Ralph Sadleir and Laurence Winnington who regranted it on 10 October 1553 to Edward Prin, the first Master of the Merchant Venturers.[22] The property was subsequently

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found in the chest the charters of Edward VI, Elizabeth I, Charles I and Charles II as well as "The Act of Queen Elizabeth" and it ordered the clerk to make copies of the Act. (*H.B.4*, 18 July 1720; *H.B.5*, 1 Jan. 1725). Clearly this was the Act of 1566. There is no trace of a copy of the Act of 1571 in the Society's records, but the Act did not escape the notice of the Municipal Corporation Commissioners in 1833. See *Reports from the Commissioners on Municipal Corporation in England and Wales: Bristol*, 1835, p. 54.

[20] P.R.O.: E 404/119, Exchequer Warrants for Issue, 9 Feb. 15 Elizabeth. I am indebted to Mrs. Jean Vanes for this reference.

[21] The fact that there is no evidence of elections being held or regulations being made is not, of course, conclusive. But for a lease of 1564, the charter of 1566 and the grant of arms of 1569, we would not know the names of any masters and wardens between 1552 and 1569, but the Society nevertheless continued to exist. Absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence.

[22] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 66–7, 96. Grant by Ralph Sadleir and Lawrence Winnington of the chapel vulgarly called St. Clement's Chapel and other property granted then by letters patent 15 December 4 Edward VI, to Edward Prynne (Merchants' Hall records: Deeds Box 5 Bdle. A2). On 10 October 1561, Erasmus Prynne, son and heir of Edward Prynne deceased, assigned the premises to Thomas Aldworth and Thomas Symondes (Deeds Box 5 Bdle. A2).

granted to a number of merchants who held it as feoffees.[23] The continuity of the Society was thus maintained primarily through the feoffees who held the property. Through one of the leases which they made, it is possible to establish the identity of two more wardens whose names have not hitherto been known. In 1564, a house in Fisher Lane, which was part of the property, was leased to Thomas Nutte by George Snygge and William Hickes who are described as "of the citie of Bristow merchantes and wardens of the house comenlye called Saynte Clementes Chapell and of the Almes-house next thereunto adjoyninge . . .", and the lease was granted with the assent of the feoffees of the property, including William Pepwall, William Carre, John Cutt, Gyles Whyte, Thomas Chester and most of the others to whom the property had been granted in 1561.[24]

It would also appear that the feoffees continued to maintain the almshouse for 12 poor mariners. This seems to be the conclusion to be drawn from a letter signed by various members of the privy council which was addressed to the mayor and aldermen of Bristol on 5 October 1595.[25] The privy council's letter stated that the Council understood that an almshouse for aged and impotent sailors had been erected in Bristol in times past and that by consent of the merchants and mariners 1½d. was levied on every ton of merchants' goods and 1d. in the pound deducted from sailors' wages to maintain an almshouse and free school for mariners' children as well as to pay a minister to say service at a chapel in Shirehampton for the benefit of sailors who could not go far from their ships. The privy council understood that this godly order had been withstood by "reprisers"[26] and by those going on fishing voyages to Newfoundland. In order to help the great number of mariners maimed in the Queen's service or on reprisal voyages, the Council instructed the Mayor and aldermen to assist the collectors to get their dues from "reprisers" and Newfoundland men as well as from other merchants. Thus the almshouse and the school continued, whatever may have happened to the Society, since they were under the control of legally appointed trustees.

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[23] On 20 November 4 Elizabeth (1561) Thomas Aldworth and Thomas Symonds conveyed the property by way of feofment to William Pepwall, William Carr, John Cutt, Gyles White, Thomas Shipman, George Snygg, Thomas Chester, Thomas Kelke, John Browne, George Higgons, Dominic Chester, Richard Hentley, William Yong, John Saunders, John Carr son of William Carr, John Bysse, William Cutt, son of John, John Kelke, son of Thomas, William Chester, son of Thomas, Edward Chester, George Snygg, son of George Snygg, John Halton, son of Robert Halton, Thomas Symondes, son of Thomas Symondes, Benjamin Boydell, son of John Boydell, John Browne, son of John Browne, Richard Yong, son of William Yong, Peter Smythe, son of Robert Smith, and John Cutt, son of John Cutt.

[24] Merchants' Hall Record: Deeds Box 5, Bdle. A2. See also Note 21.

[25] *Cal. S.P.D. Elizabeth, 1595–1598*, pp. 105–6; *Book of Trade*, p. 39; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 97–8.

[26] Those going on reprisal or privateering voyages against Spanish shipping.

Presumably by 1600 a number of the original feoffees were dead or no longer active, for on 12 January of that year George Snygge, William Chester, Richard Younge, John Browne and Thomas Symondes granted the premises to 40 new feoffees.[27] Some of these feoffees also obtained later in the same year a lease for 90 years at a rent of £3 6s. 8d. of the duties of anchorage, cannage and plankage due from all ships arriving at the port. In return, they agreed to provide sufficient planks and to keep clean the slip at Hungroad. This was apparently a renewal of a former lease granted about 1570, and it is yet another link with the past and with the future.[28]

But although there clearly existed throughout the second half of the sixteenth century a group of merchants who owned St. Clement's Chapel and the almshouse and who collected certain dues, this was not quite the same thing as a Society exercising the powers granted by the charters and regulating the foreign trade of Bristol. John Latimer thought that the Society was "practically moribund" by the end of the sixteenth century and seemed to suggest that this was due to the prostration of commerce and industry.[29] It is true that overseas commerce experienced a number of severe depressions under Elizabeth I. The French Wars of Religion, the troubles in Ireland and the various interruptions in trade with Spain and Portugal, culminating in open war in 1585, had serious repercussions on Bristol's overseas markets, but trade depression was not characteristic of the whole of Elizabeth's reign, and there were a number of quite long bright intervals.[30] The dormant, or even moribund, condition of the Society of Merchant Venturers cannot be satisfactorily explained solely, or even mainly, in terms of commercial depression. It seems more likely that the Society, after receiving the serious blow of 1571, became more or less inactive, not because trade was declining, but because there emerged a rival organisation on a national basis which secured a monopoly of the trade with one of Bristol's most important markets – the Iberian peninsula.

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[27] Merchants' Hall Records: Deeds Box 5 Bdle. A2. The premises was granted to William Hickes, William Ellies, John Hopkins, Richard Jones (Aldermen of Bristol), John Whitson, Thomas Barnes, John Barker, Matthew Havellande, Robert Aldworth, Abell Kitchin, John Boulton, John Rowberowe, George White, John Fowenns, John Aldworth, John Robertes, Richard Powell, Thomas White, Edward Morrice, Thomas Whitehead, Robert Johnson, Thomas Aldworth, John Sandford, John Angell, William Cole of Smal Street, Arthur Hibbyne, George Wilkins, Peter Goughe, William Graves, John Gyttonns, Robert Havelland, Henry Adams, William Havelland, William Ellies, John Ellies, John Pytt, Thomas Davies, Thomas Anthonie, Francis Doubtinge and William Mellyne of Bristol, merchants. Most of them can be shown to be members of the reorganised Society of Merchant Venturers in the seventeenth century.

[28] Bristol Record Office: 00352(5), 20 Sept. 1601. The grant is to 24 merchants of Bristol of whom 16 are in the list of feoffees of 1600 (see note 26 above); *Merchant Venturers*, p. 63.

[29] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 60–2.

[30] It was not until this book was in the press that I had an opportunity of examining Dr. Jean Vanes' Ph.D. thesis 'The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Sixteenth Century' recently presented for the Ph.D. degree of the University of London.

Latimer was aware that John Whitson and other prominent Bristol merchants were members of the Spanish Company, but he did not realise the extent to which Bristol was affected by the development of that Company in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In 1577, the Crown granted to members of the Spanish Company the sole right of trading with Spain and Portugal.[31] The foundation members were named in the letters patent. They included certain courtiers and officials, over 200 London merchants and 173 merchants from other ports. No less than 76 Bristolians were named as members, and Bristol supplied 3 of the 40 assistants who governed the Company.[32] The earliest entry in the first surviving Treasurer's Book of the Society of Merchant Venturers is an account by John Barker, Treasurer, of "Reyde monyes disimborsed to the yowse of the company of marchantes of by [*sic*] Bristoll Tradinge Spayne and Portingall. . . ."[33] This is clearly an account, not of the Society of Merchant Venturers, but of the Spanish Company's Bristol branch. It seems likely that after 1577 the Society had lost a great deal of its significance as far as the prominent merchants were concerned since the Spanish and Portuguese markets, which were so important to Bristolians, were no longer under its control, and the merchants engaged in these trades may have lost interest in the Society and concerned themselves instead with the Bristol branch of the Spanish Company.[34]

So little is known about either the Bristol branch of the Spanish Company or about the Bristol Merchant Venturers in the later sixteenth century that it is impossible to say whether the two did in fact exist simultaneously, and if they did, what were the relations between them. Assuming that the Merchant Venturers were still an active body when the Spanish Company was incorporated in 1577, there could have been for a time two distinct merchant organisations in Bristol, the one for merchants in general, the other limited to those trading to Spain and Portugal. Presumably a number of merchants could have belonged to both. It is possible, on the other hand, that after 1577 the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers, while retaining its rights under the Charter of 1552, also acted under the Charter of the Spanish Company for those of its members who traded to Spain and Portugal.[35] The fact that one of the Spanish Company's accounts has been preserved in the Treasurer's Book of the Society of Merchant Venturers might indicate some relationship, but on the other hand this may be accidental. The accountant in 1583 was John Barker. The Master of the Society in 1617–18, when the Society's records were put in order, was also John Barker. Possibly he had inherited the book which contained only one account and decided that it would be a pity to waste it and that it could be used to keep the Society's accounts.

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[31] The letters patent to the Spanish Company are printed in V. M. Shillington and A. B. Wallis Chapman, *The Commercial Relations of England and Portugal*, pp. 313–26. For an account of the company, see Pauline Croft, *The Spanish Company*, London Record Society, 1973.

[32] Printed in McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 2, 3.

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 81–4.

[34] The retailers of Bristol who had opposed the Society of Merchant Venturers did not find the Spanish Company any more satisfactory. In 1578, Philip Langley, who together with others who had opposed the Act of 1566 and who had joined the Spanish Company, was said to be continuing "the trade of a notorious retailer" and was in danger of being brought before the Privy Council. *Acts of the Privy Council 1577–1578*, pp. 408, 409.

There is another piece of evidence which is difficult to interpret. On 27 March 1583, Thomas Aldworth, Mayor of Bristol, replied to a letter from Sir Francis Walsingham concerning a proposed voyage of discovery to America. He said that on receipt of Walsingham's letter, he had conferred with those sympathetic to the enterprise "especially with M. William Salterne deputie of our company of merchants". As Aldworth was ill, Salterne had "with as convenient speede as he could . . . caused an assemblie of the merchants to be gathered. . . ."[36] This suggests that there existed in Bristol in 1583 a company of merchants of which William Salterne was "deputie". Now, the Society of Merchant Venturers did not use the term "deputy" for any of its officials, but the Spanish Company did, and so this is possibly another reference to that organisation.

The Spanish Company was thrown into confusion by the war with Spain in 1585, but after the peace of 1604 it obtained confirmation of its old privileges. A new patent was subsequently granted to it on 31 May 1605, and the Company retained its monopoly of the trade with Spain and Portugal. Of the 577 merchants named in the patent, 97 were Bristolians.[37]

The agitation for a freer trade and the attack on some of the London-controlled trading companies in the parliament of 1604 may well have made the Bristol merchants anxious to assert their independence and to throw off the control of the Spanish Company.[38]

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[35] In the eighteenth century, the Society often acted for those of its members who traded to Africa and was the channel of communication between them and the African Company in London.

[36] Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, Glasgow, 1904, pp. viii. 133–4.

[37] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. xv, xvi, 2, 3.

[38] The Spanish Company was under heavy fire at national level. For the

According to the Society's *Book of Charters*, drawn up in 1618, the Merchant Venturers met in a general court on 7 May 1605 in St. Clement's Chapel, and by virtue of the letters patent of 1552 elected a master, two wardens and a treasurer for the following year.[39] There is something rather unusual about the fact that this meeting was held in May. It was not the time prescribed by the Charter, and all the other meetings for election of officers recorded in the *Book of Charters* between 1606 and 1639 were in October, November or December. It is possible that the clerk who recorded in 1618 a meeting which had been held 13 years earlier made a mistake about the date, but it is more likely that this was an extraordinary general meeting and that the merchants had decided to act again under their grant of 1552 and to revive an organisation which had either died or been put into cold storage.

If this interpretation is correct, it is the initiative of the Society of Merchant Venturers which lies behind an ordinance passed by the Common Council of the city on 31 December 1605.[40] By this ordinance it was agreed that the merchant adventurers of Bristol "shall exempt themselves from the Companye and Governement of the merchanntes adventurers of London tradinge into Spayne and Portugall" and that "there shalbe a Companye of merchauntes adventurers of the Cytie of Bristol contynued and established in the same Cytie of Bristoll to be ordered and governed amongst themselves by such Orders Constitucions and Pollycyes as shalbe hereafter set downe and agreed on by the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Councell of the said Cytie and by the Master Wardens Communytie and Corporation of merchanntes within the said Cytie of Bristoll". Every burgess who wished to use the trade of merchandise might join for a fine of 20s. provided he gave over "the exercise of all other trades occupacions and proffessions of getting his . . . Lyvinge". All other merchants who were already free of the said company were to pay 6s. 8d. Any one who wanted to be admitted after a year from the date of the ordinance was to pay "as ys payd in lyke case in London", except members of the Common Council who were still to be admitted for 20s. Sons and apprentices of members who had been brought up in the trade of a merchant were to pay only 6s. 8d. Alderman William Hicks was appointed Treasurer to receive the fines, three men were named to deal with admissions and 12 men were appointed "Committees for the merchauntes Ordynances".

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arguments for and against the Company, see C. T. Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, Selden Society, Vol. XXVIII, pp. xxiv, xxv. In 1606, parliament opened the Spanish and Portuguese trades to all subjects of the English crown (*Statutes of the Realm*, iv, Part ii, 1083).

[39] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 54; *Book of Charters 1*, p. 33.

[40] Bristol Record Office: *Common Council Proceedings 1598–1608*, pp. 112–13; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 2–6.

Alderman John Hopkins was appointed Master and William Vawer and John Whitson wardens.

There is some ambiguity about two of the phrases used in the City's ordinance. They state that the Society of Merchant Adventurers shall be *contynued and established* and that those merchants *already Free of the same Company* shall pay only 6s. 8d. for admission. It could be argued that this shows that a separate company was in fact in existence before the ordinance was passed, and that this provides evidence that the Society of Merchant Venturers had not died or become moribund in the later sixteenth century. It seems more likely that the resurrection of the Society had in fact occurred in May 1605 when a Master and two wardens were elected and that the ambiguous phrases refer to this and do not necessarily prove the continuous existence of the Society under Elizabeth I.

The Act of Common Council of 31 December 1605 makes no mention of the charters of 1552 and 1566, and the authority behind this establishment of a separate company of merchants was the City's, not the Crown's. The divorce between the Society and the Corporation which had led to the Act of Parliament of 1571 had come to an end, and the remarriage of 1605 was to lead to a long and fruitful partnership.

CHAPTER 3

The Seventeenth-Century Background

THE Society of Merchant Venturers which was reconstituted in 1605 was destined to play a major role in the development of Bristol, and although we are concerned primarily with the history of the Merchant Venturers as a corporate body and not with the general history of Bristol, it is necessary to say something about the city in the seventeenth century in order to understand the work of the Society in its local and national setting.

The population of seventeenth-century England rose from about 4 millions at the beginning of the period to about 5½ millions at the end.[1] Although trade and industry were of increasing importance, agriculture dominated the economy. The small governing class consisted mostly of landowners, and land was the main source of wealth and the means by which most Englishmen got a living. The majority of people were to be found in small villages, not in towns, and it has been estimated that 6 out of 7 Englishmen lived in communities of less than 1,000.

In this essentially rural world, towns in general, and some towns in particular, played a part the importance of which was all the greater because it was the exceptional rather than the normal. Overwhelmingly greater than any other town was what provincials often regarded as the over-mighty capital of London. Its population was probably between 200,000 and 250,000 at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it had risen to well over 500,000 by the end.[2] The metropolis was the centre of government, the seat of the law courts, an industrial area of great importance and a money market. It acted like a magnet, drawing to itself from all parts of England large numbers of people who came for business or pleasure. It was a great market for agricultural produce which reached it by land, river and sea from almost every English county. Its enormous wealth enabled it to play an important political role, not least in the Civil War. It was the major port in England, and a vast collecting and distributing centre for exports and imports. Though it went over eighty per cent of the exports of England's major industry, the manufacture of woollen cloth. Its merchants, or some of them, controlled the great companies for foreign trade, such as the Merchant Adventurers of England, the East India Company, the Levant Company, the Russian Company, the Eastland Company and the Royal African Company. Its mercantile interests were able to get privileges and to influence the policy of the government, and from time to time there was conflict when the merchants of the outports fought the privileged London groups at the Council table in Whitehall or in the parliament house at Westminster.[3]

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[1] There is some uncertainty about the precise size of the population in 1600, but for the end of the century there are detailed contemporary estimates by Gregory King which have stood the test of modern research. See D. Glass, "Gregory King and the Population of England and Wales at the end of the 17th Century", *Eugenics Review*, 1946, and "Gregory King's Estimate of the Population of England and Wales, 1695", *Population Studies*, 1950.

[2] Gregory King put the population of London in 1688 at 530,000. For estimates of London's population at various times in the seventeenth century, see N. G. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London*, 1935.

No other town came anywhere near London in size or importance. In 1688, Gregory King estimated that 530,000 people lived in London, that is, nearly one-tenth of the total population. He calculated that there were 870,000 living in "The other Cities and Market Towns". Recent research has suggested that he had in mind some 800 places, so that many of what he called "Cities and Market Towns" can hardly be regarded as urban centres as we understand the term and were really large villages. At the top, or very near the top, of these provincial cities came Bristol which, together with Norwich, York and Southampton, made up towards the end of the seventeenth century a group of 4 towns each with a population of between 25,000 and 30,000. Then came 10 cities of about 18,000; 30 of about 2,200 and 100 of about 1,300.[4]

Bristol was very small compared with London, but it was one of the largest of the outports and by the end of the seventeenth century it was probably the second city in the kingdom. We cannot be certain about the size of its population, but it is probable that it rose from somewhere between 12,000 and 14,000 at the beginning of the period to between 25,000 and 27,000 at the end.[5] This was about one-twentieth of the population of London, but the importance of Bristol was much greater than these figures might suggest, and Londoners certainly took it very seriously. It made a great impression on all visitors and continually reminded them of the capital. An enthusiastic gentleman from Norwich in 1634 called it "a second London",[6] and the seasoned traveller, Peter Mundy, remarked in 1639 that "Bristoll is even a little London for Merchants, shipping and great well-furnished Marketts . . . and I think second to it in the Kingdom off England For these particulars and others".[7] The judicious Evelyn in 1654 described it as "A Citty emulating London, not for its large extent, but manner of building, shops, bridge, Traffique, Exchange, Market place",[8] and Samuel Pepys, who enjoyed himself immensely during his visit, observed without qualification that "(it) is in every respect another London".[9]

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[3] F. J. Fisher, "The Development of the London Food Market 1540–1640", *Economic History Review*, v, 1935; "The Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, xxx, 1949; "London's Export Trade in the early Seventeenth Century", *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, iii, 1950. The survey of the companies for foreign trade in E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, ii, 1947, is still useful.

[4] Peter Laslett, *The World we have lost*, 1965, pp. 55–6; D. Glass, "Gregory King's Estimate of the Population of England and Wales, 1695", *Population Studies*, 1950.

[5] Bryan Little, *The City and County of Bristol*, 1954, Appendix 1, pp. 325 ff.

The Bristol in which the Merchant Venturers consolidated their position and grew in importance in the seventeenth century was a compact city, the main part of which lay enclosed between the rivers Avon and Frome, on the quays of which ships from England, Wales and Ireland, as well as from overseas unloaded their merchandise.[10] South of the Avon lay the suburbs of Temple and Redcliffe in a bend of the river and still enclosed by a wall. On the north of the Frome stood the Cathedral of the Holy and Undivided Trinity and its precincts; College Green and the hospital of Saint Mark; St. Michael's Hill, St. James's, Lewin's Mead, the Horse Fair and Broad Mead. Even in the early seventeenth century there was a fair amount of building in the suburbs, and in the boom years after the Restoration, Bristol continued to spread beyond its ancient limits. In his plan of 1673, Millerd remarked that "in few years last past, this Cittie hath been much augmented by the increase of buildings in most parts thereof, especially on the West and North West sides, where the rising of the Hill St. Michael being converted into Comely buildings and pleasant gardens makes a very beautiful addition to the suburbs thereof". The editions of Millerd in 1684 and 1696 show the expansion in the suburbs in the later part of the century.

Although Bristol was expanding, the growth was not so extensive as to transform the character of the city, as it did in London. Most of the population was still concentrated within the medieval walls. The merchants normally lived in houses in the heart of the town, and their homes were also their business premises. Samuel Pepys was

[6] *A Relation of a Short Survey of 26 Counties By a Captain, a Lieutenant, and an Ancient, all three of the Military Company in Norwich,* edit. L. G. Wickham Legg, 1904, p. 90.

[7] *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia 1605–1667,* edit. Lt. Col. Sir Richard Carnac Temple, Hakluyt Society, 1925, p. 11.

[8] *The Diary of John Evelyn,* edit. E. S. de Beer, Oxford, 1955, iii, 102.

[9] *Diary of Samuel Pepys,* edit. H. B. Wheatley, 1896, viii, 46.

[10] James Millerd's splendid plan of Bristol in 1673 has been reprinted by the Bristol City Museum. The plan has a number of illustrations and comments.

very much impressed by Deb's uncle "a sober merchant, very good company, and so like one of our sober, wealthy, London merchants, as pleased me mightily". He had "a substantial good house, and well furnish'd", and "did give us good entertainment of strawberries, a whole venison-pasty, cold, and plenty of brave wine, and above all Bristoll milk". It was a city in which rich and poor rubbed shoulders in the narrow streets of the relatively small area in which they all lived and worked. When his visit came to an end, Pepys commented "So thence took leave, and he with us through the city, where in walking I find the city pay him great respect, and he the like to the meanest, which pleased me mightily".[11] The Yorkshireman Marmaduke Rawdon was more critical. He thought that there were "many proper men, but very few handsome woemen, and most of them ill bred, being generally men and woemen very proud, not affable to strangers, but rather admiringe themselves, soe that an ordnary fellow that is but a freeman of Bristoll, he conciets himselfe to be as grave as a senator of Rome, and very sparinge of his hatt. . . ." The drivers of sledges were very rude people "that will have thir horses uppon a strangers backe before they be awarr", but even Rawdon could not complain about the hospitality he received for "Duringe his stay att Bristoll he was feasted by the sheriffe, the colector of the coustome howse, and by severall gentlemen and marchants of quallitie."[12]

The city in which the merchants lived and died had many attractions for visitors. Although Bristol had fewer churches in proportion to its size than York or Norwich, there were some nineteen parish churches whose towers and spires rose high above the tall wooden buildings of the ancient city and added dignity and beauty to it. Even without its spire, the magnificent parish church of St. Mary Redcliffe could challenge comparison with any in the kingdom and was, said Millerd, "highly esteemed by the inhabitants & much admired by strangers". The cathedral was less worthy of note, and Marmaduke Rawdon with Yorkshire bluntness called it "the meanest in England".[13]

The parish churches included St. James's, which was familiar to Londoners and others who came to St. James's Fair; Temple Church with its leaning tower; All Saints, alongisde of which stood the Merchants' Tolzey; the chapel of St. Mark or the Gaunts which was the only municipally-owned chapel in the country; St. Nicholas, part of which stood over the gateway which led from Bristol Bridge to the High Street; and St. John's and St. Leonard's, built along the line of the medieval walls. In these parish churches, the merchants worshipped and played a prominent part in parochial life as feoffees of church property and contributors to parish charities. The high standard of the Bristol churchwardens' accounts suggests that they took care to see that the books were properly kept.

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[11] *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, edit. H. B. Wheatley, 1896, viii, 46, 47.

[12] *The Life of Marmaduke Rawdon of York*, edit. R. Davies, Camden Society, 1863, pp. 173, 188.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Of special concern to merchants was the Merchants' Tolzey, a convenient covered walk where they could meet to do business. Here were placed the "nails", four of which are still preserved in Corn Street. Peter Mundy refers to them in 1639 when he says "By the high Crosse is the exchaunge where there are many curious costly pillars off brasse, set about 3 or 4 Foote high, broad att the Foote and toppe, sett off purpose For them to leane on, pay and tell Mony. . . ."[14]

The Hall of the Society of Merchant Venturers, formerly the chapel of St. Clement, stood in King Street, near the Broad Quay. In Millerd's map of 1673 it appears as a plain, unpretentious building. It was not until the eighteenth century that the Society got down to the business of establishing a headquarters which would show something of the commanding position it held in the city.

Among the other important buildings in Bristol was Spicer's Hall near Bristol Bridge at which strangers (that is, non-burgesses) were required to offer their goods for sale. There were, too, a number of halls belonging to various gilds which continued to flourish in the seventeenth century. A contemporary noted, with some exaggeration, that "to make her still more suitable to the Metropolis of our Nation, London, She hath for every Company a severall hall", and, he added, "To grace and add to her beauty, she maintains 3 Foot Companies besides a voluntary Company of gentile, proper, martiall, disciplin'd men who have their Armes lodg'd in a handsome Artillery House, newly built up in the Castle yard, where once in a year, they invite, and entertaine, both Earles, and Lords, and a great many Knights, and Gentlemen of ranke, and quality, at their Military Feast. . . ."[15] The merchants as leading citizens were expected to play their part in the defence of their city in time of need, and a number of them were officers in the militia. When, however, they found themselves unexpectedly involved in the Civil War, they did not show any great determination, and it seems that they, like many other Englishmen, were anxious to avoid being involved if they could possibly help it.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, part of Bristol Castle still remained. It had long since ceased to be useful, and it was rapidly ceasing to be decorative. It was finally demolished in 1655, and Millerd commented in 1673 that "since ye late Warrs (it) hath bin demolished & is now turned into faire streets & pleasant dwellings . . . ". Merchants played a considerable part in the building development of the sixteen-fifties which gave the Corporation an opportunity of indulging in a measure of town-planning.

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[14] Peter Mundy, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 10.

[15] *A Relation of A Short Survey of 26 Counties* (*supra*, note 6), pp. 93, 94.

But if the medieval castle was in its death agonies, there still remained as a splendid legacy from the past the thirteenth-century bridge over the Avon on which there were built houses four or five stories high. In the centre, with the road passing underneath, was the building which had once been the Chapel of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Bristol Bridge challenged comparison with London Bridge. Celia Fiennes noted the resemblance, but said it was not so big or so long.[16] Millerd, the proud Bristolian, said it was very fair and lofty and added "though in length it cometh much short of it, yet in fairness of building it goeth as much beyond the famous Bridge of London over Thames".

There were, of course, a considerable number of inns and alehouses in seventeenth-century Bristol. The ordinances of the Gild of Innholders of 1606 lists 18 authorised inns,[17] but the number of licensed and unlicensed houses grew with the need to provide for an expanding population and a large number of outsiders who came for business or pleasure. Some of the inns like the White Hart and the White Lion in Broad Street were highly respectable places at which people of quality could meet and stay. The three Inns in Corn Street furnished entertainment for Lady Castlemaine in 1674 and for a papal nuncio in 1687, but there were many others, less respectable, for the lower orders and the floating population of the port.

Another notable feature of seventeenth-century Bristol was the large number of almshouses. There were nine in existence at the beginning, and the number was doubled in the course of the century. They included the Merchant Venturers' own almshouse for poor and decayed seamen, which had originally belonged to the Gild of Mariners but which the merchants took over in the mid-sixteenth century.[18] Among the new foundations was the one established by Edward Colston on St. Michael's Hill in 1696. Colston came of a merchant family in Bristol but was apprenticed in London where he made a great fortune. His fine new almshouses attracted the attention of Celia Fiennes who described it at length. The Society of Merchant Venturers was closely associated with it, since Colston made the Merchants trustees and administrators of the foundation.[19]

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[16] *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, edit. Christopher Morris, 1949, p. 238.

[17] Printed in *The Deposition Books of Bristol Vol. 1, 1643–1647*, edit. H. E. Nott, Bristol Record Society, vi, 1935, Appendix IV, pp. 271 ff.

[18] See pp. 18, 81.

[19] See p. 204.

Bristol was much less well endowed with schools, and those which it had were not particularly distinguished. At the beginning of the period there was in existence the Free School near the Frome Gate (that is, Bristol Grammar School, situated in St. Bartholomew's Hospital); the Cathedral School which had been refounded in 1542, the Free Grammar and Writing School at Redcliffe established by royal charter in 1571 and Queen Elizabeth's Hospital opened in 1590. The Red Maids school for girls was established in 1634 in accordance with the terms of the will of one of the most distinguished Merchant Venturers, John Whitson.[20] The Society itself maintained a schoolmaster for teaching poor mariners' children.[21] There were one or two other charity schools, and a number of bequests had been made by merchants and others for educational purposes, but in the main remarkably little was done to extend or improve educational facilities. It was a subject concerning which visitors to Bristol had no comment to make.

Most of the houses were built of wood and plaster. At the end of the century, Celia Fiennes noted as her general impression that "the buildings of the town are pretty high most of timber work, the streetes are narrow and something darkish, because the roomes on the upper storys are more jutting out, soe contracts the street and the light". She said many of them had signs hanging out even though they were not public houses, just as they did in London. She added that in the suburbs were better buildings and more spacious streets.[22] But even within the city itself, there were a number of "great houses", some of them built of stone, including the Great House on St. Augustine's Bank and the mansion of the Creswickes, a merchant family, in Small Street which was frequently used for the entertainment of distinguished visitors. Fuller remarked that "The houses of the merchants herein are generally very fair; and their entries, though little and narrow, lead into high and spacious halls, which form may mind the inhabitants thereof of their passage to a better place".[23] Many of the larger houses had outbuildings and spacious gardens, and the whole city was honeycombed with cellars which were in great demand for storage of goods.

Judged by contemporary standards, seventeenth-century Bristol was well drained and had a good water supply. Philemon Holland's edition of Camden's *Britannia*, published in 1610, mentions "common Sewes or Sinks . . . so made to run under the ground for the conveniance and washing away of all filth, that for the cleanlinesse and holesomenesse a man would not desire more",[24] and Richard Blome in his *Britannia* remarked that "Its streets are so neatly ordered (by reason of the River Avon, which runneth through it, together with the common sinks and sewes underground) that no filth or ordure is to be seen among its inhabitants".[25] A number of conduits brought water from Brandon Hill, Kingsdown and Ashley Hill down into the city from the north side of the Frome, and others supplied Temple and Redcliffe. There were various public supply points, including the pipe on the Quay and another at St. John's church. Some private houses had their own water pipes from the conduits, and there were, of course, a number of wells.

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[20] For Whitson, see Patrick McGrath, *John Whitson and the Merchant Community of Bristol*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1970.

[21] See pp. 18, 84.

[22] *Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, edit. Christopher Morris, pp. 237, 238.

[23] *The History of the Worthies of England*, edit. P. A. Nuttall, 1840, iii, 113.

The government of Bristol in this period was in the hands of the Mayor, aldermen and Common Council consisting of a little over forty members.[26] The Mayor was chosen annually by the Common Council from three names, one submitted by the retiring Mayor, one by the aldermen, and one by the whole body of the Council. There were 12 aldermen including the Recorder. When a vacancy occurred, it was filled by the Council from ex-mayors and "older and graver" councillors. Vacancies in Common Council were filled by co-option, and the majority of the burgesses had no say in choosing their governing body. For the most part they do not seem to have minded, for it was a hierarchical society in which the ordinary people accepted the established order.

Very considerable powers were concentrated in the hands of the Mayor and aldermen who were also *ex officio* justices of the peace. The Recorder was usually a lawyer of distinction in London whose advice was helpful in some of the major legal conflicts in which the corporation was from time to time involved. There were two sheriffs usually chosen from the younger members of the Council who thus had a strenuous and quite costly introduction to public life, and there was a Town Clerk whose services were required in legal business but who did not act as a Town Clerk in the modern sense of the term.

The most important executive officer was the Chamberlain who handled the finances and who was responsible for the annual accounts. He dealt with admissions to the freedom, apprenticeship, weights and measures and a host of other matters, and he was frequently required to represent the city's interests in London. After 1612 when the Chamberlain went bankrupt, the future Chamberlains were appointed annually by the Common Council, but it was usual for the holder to be a merchant who was kept in office for a number of years.

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[24] *Britain, or a Chorographical Description. . . . Written first in Latine by William Camden . . . Translated . . . by Philemon Holland,* 1610, p. 237.

[25] Richard Blome, *Britannia,* 1673, p. 101.

[26] For the government of Bristol in this period, see the Introduction to *Bristol Charters 1509–1899,* edit. R. C. Latham, Bristol Record Society, xii, 1947.

To represent its interests at Westminster, the city had two M.P.s elected on what was, for the seventeenth century, a very wide franchise. Bristol, unlike so many other towns, did not choose its members of parliament from the county gentry of the surrounding areas. In the seventeenth century, it preferred to have its interests represented by its own leading men. Of the 31 members who sat for Bristol between 1601 and 1698, 20 belonged to the Society of Merchant Venturers. Of the remaining 11, five were City Recorders and one the Town Clerk. In nearly half the parliaments of the period, Bristol was represented by two Merchant Venturers.[27]

An examination of the lists of civic officials and members of the Common Council in seventeenth-century Bristol shows clearly the dominant part played by Merchant Venturers in municipal government. They constituted approximately half of the Common Councillors chosen during the period, and they generally held the key positions in city politics. Of the 105 mayors between 1600 and 1700, at least 69 were Merchant Venturers, as were 65 of the 118 aldermen, 8 of the 11 city chamberlains and over half the sheriffs. An illustration of what this meant in practice is provided by an examination of the city government in July 1643. At that time the Common Council consisted of 40 members. 28 of these, including the Mayor, the Chamberlain, 9 of the 11 aldermen and both the sheriffs were Merchant Venturers. Again, in the newly constituted corporation of 1684, 24 of the 43 members belonged to the Society, including the Mayor, Chamberlain, six aldermen and one of the sheriffs. At that time the Recorder and the Town Clerk were also *ex gratia* members.[28]

In a century during which religious, constitutional and political issues played so big a part, Bristol remained to a considerable degree outside the mainstream of national life. Puritanism seems to have been of no significance until the Civil War, and no Bristolian fought with Sir John Eliot and the others in the parliamentary battles of the early Stuarts. Politics for Bristolians in these years meant not the Petition of Right or the liberties of the subject, but resistance to London – dominated monopolies or to the government's attempts to raise money. It is notable that the two Bristol M.P.s elected to the Long Parliament, both of them Merchant Venturers, were expelled by the House in 1642 as participators in the wine monopoly.[29] In their place, Bristol elected another Merchant Venturer, John Taylor, and the city's Recorder, Sir John Glanville. Taylor was disabled from sitting on 5 February 1644 as an adherent of the King and was killed when Fairfax attacked the city later in the year. Glanville was disabled from sitting in 1645. The fate of Bristol in the Civil War depended not so much on the attitude of its leading men, who, generally speaking, were not deeply committed, but on the military situation in the surrounding areas.

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[27] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. xxviii–xxix.

[28] For the relationship between the city government and the Merchant Venturers, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. xxvii ff.

[29] See p. 67.

In the course of the Commonwealth period, nonconformity became of significance in Bristol, and there also developed fierce political feuds between those who collaborated with the government and those who did not. The fight between the collaborators and their opponents became very intense at times under the later Stuarts, and the situation was complicated by the presence of a large nonconformist body in the city and by differences in attitude towards royal authority. Personalities too played their part in the conflicts.[30] Although a number of Merchant Venturers were involved in their personal capacity, the Society itself remained basically non-political. The battles were fought in the Council Chamber and in the elections, not in the Merchants' Hall. Nor was the Society divided on religious grounds. Nonconformity was to be found in the post-Restoration years among some Bristol merchants and wealthy retailers, but the Merchant Venturers accepted the established church. One gets the impression that with some exceptions they considered political and religious issues less important than economic issues. The Royal African Company was in many ways more objectionable than a Popish King.

The greatness of Bristol in the seventeenth century obviously depended on its trade, and the merchants were overwhelmingly the most important group, but it is necessary to stress that Bristol was a city with a considerable variety of occupations.[31] Apart from a number of detailed studies of sugar-refining,[32] comparatively little work has so far been done on Bristol's industries in this period, but they were clearly of importance, and there was considerable industrial growth as the century went on. It is true that the great cloth industry, which had played so big a part in the middle ages, seems to have declined drastically. Little is known of the Weaver's Gild, for instance, after 1630, although it existed as late as 1673, and the Gild of Dyers apparently disappeared after the civil war. Nevertheless, cloth-making still went on and the seventeenth-century Burgess Books contain a considerable number of entries of cloth-workers of all kinds. As late as 1696 the Quakers established a workhouse intended to assist unemployed Quaker weavers.[33]

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[30] For the conflicts in Bristol after the Restoration, see the section on "The Corporation and the Crown, 1660–1710" in *Bristol Charters 1509–1809*, edit. R. C. Latham, Bristol Record Society, xii, 1947, pp. 35 ff.

[31] There is a useful survey of the various occupations in Bristol in Frank Rogers, "The Bristol Craft Gilds during the 16th and 17th centuries", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis, 1949.

[32] I. V. Hall, "Whitson Court Sugar House, Bristol 1665–1824", *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestership Archaeological Society*, lxv, 1946; "John Knight Junior, Sugar Refiner at the Great House on St. Augustine's Back 1654–1679", *ibid.*, lxviii, 1957; "Temple St. Sugar House under the First Partnership of Richard Lane and John Hine, 1662–78", *ibid.*, lxxvi, 1958.

The metal industries provided work for a large number of wire-drawers, pin-makers, card-makers, smiths, cutlers, grinders, spurriers, farriers, locksmiths, gunsmiths and gun-makers; the leather industry for numerous cordwainers, cobblers, shoemakers, tanners, whittawers, pursers, glovers, pouch-makers and saddlers; and the building industry for joiners, cofferers, carvers, turners, carpenters, tilers, plasterers, masons, bricklayers, paviers, plumbers and glasiers. In many of these industries, there was still a considerable degree of gild organisation, as there was in the very important victualling trades where there existed companies of brewers, butchers, bakers and inn-holders.

The ship-building and allied trades provided work for many more. Little is known about the size and organisation of the industry in this period, but a number of ships were built for the Royal Navy, and there must have been a great variety of vessels built for the merchant navy and for coastal and river traffic. The industrial population included shipwrights, sail-makers, anchor-smiths and rope-makers.

Another very old Bristol industry was soap making. In the early part of the seventeenth century this was important, and there was considerable trouble between the Bristol manufacturers and a group of Londoners who in the sixteen-thirties endeavoured with government support to restrict production in Bristol. In the later part of the century, the industry seems to have been of little importance.[34]

If some of the older industries were decaying, new ones were coming up to take their place. Early in the century, Robert Aldworth established the first Bristol sugar house, and in 1656 a merchant, John Knight junior, set up a second refinery in the Great House on St. Augustine's Back. Several other sugar houses came into existence before the century was over.

The spread of the habit of tobacco smoking and the import into Bristol in the second half of the century of huge quantities of tobacco provided yet another opportunity for local industry. The Bristol Gild of tobacco pipe makers with a membership of at least 25 was incorporated in 1652, and in addition the cutting and rolling of tobacco provided work for many more.

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[33] Russell Mortimer, *Early Bristol Quakerism*, Bristol Branch of the *Historical Association*, 1967, p. 18.

[34] For the industry in the first half of the century, see H. E. Matthews, *Proceedings, Minutes and Enrolments of the Company of Soap Makers 1562–1642*, Bristol Record Society, x, 1940.

Another new industry which became of considerable importance in the later part of the century was glass-making. Millerd's plan of 1673 does not show any glass-houses, but by 1696 Bristol was one of the most important glass-making centres in the country with an important export trade.

It would be easy to add to the list of seventeenth-century Bristol industries, but enough has been said to show that Bristol was an industrial town of importance, even though its industry did not receive from contemporaries the attention it deserved.

The distributive trade also provided employment for a great many people. The merchant tailors, for example, had a well-organised gild with a common hall and an almshouse of their own. Some of the wealthier members traded overseas, but a number were simply concerned with making clothes. The mercers, the linen-drapers, the woollen-drapers, the haberdashers and the grocers were often merely small retailers, although here again it was not always easy to draw the line between the humble-shopkeepers and the wealthy member who was a merchant as well as a retailer.

An occupational census of seventeenth-century Bristol would have to include a great many other occupations: inn keepers, apothecaries, attornies, barber-surgeons, clerks, hardwaremen, schoolmasters as well as mariners, lightermen, pilots, porters, labourers and serving maids. How the working population was distributed among the great number of different occupations, we do not know, but one thing at least is clear – the most important group in wealth, if not in numbers, was the merchants who handled the trade on which so much else in the city depended.

The history of the merchants of England has yet to be written, and it is not easy to assess the role they played in the seventeenth century in relation to the economy as a whole. The fact that they were remarkably vocal and lost no opportunity of making their needs known to the government and to parliament may give a misleading picture of their importance in a world in which land was after all the main source of wealth, but if trade did not dominate economic activity, it certainly played a very important part, and on its prosperity depended the well-being of a considerable section of the community.

It is not easy to define precisely what was meant by the word merchant in the seventeenth century. First of all came those whose main activity consisted in overseas trade and who operated exclusively as wholesalers, but in addition there were a considerable number of people such as grocers, mercers, vintners and others who acted as importers and exporters but who nevertheless also engaged in retail trade. In Bristol some of these operated on a large scale, and the Society of Merchant Venturers endeavoured unsuccessfully to compel them to make a choice between wholesaling and retailing.[35] Roger North remarked of Bristol in the later seventeenth century that "all men that are dealers, even in shop trades, launch into adventures by sea, chiefly to the West India Plantations and Spain".[36] To these must be added masters and mariners who supplemented their pay by trading on their own account and the many individuals who had an occasional flutter. The dividing line between the various groups was not always clearly defined, but nevertheless it was generally recognised that there was a group of professionals for whom foreign trade was their main concern.

We can get a rough idea of the relative importance of merchants to other classes in the community by looking at the attempt made by Gregory King in the later seventeenth century to classify the population according to their means of getting a living. He reckoned that there were nearly 850,000 families in England. Roughly 16,500 of these were of the rank of gentry or above with a total income of £5,655,800 per annum. There were 10,000 families of office holders with an income of £1,800,000, and 10,000 families of persons in law with £1,400,000 and 10,000 families of merchants and traders by sea with a total annual income of £2,400,000. Below these groups came the masses of freeholders, farmers, artisans, cottagers, and others. Merchant families thus constituted a little over one per cent of the total number of families in England. King further divided his merchant families into two groups – a group of 2,000 with a yearly income per family of £400 and a group of 8,000 lesser merchants with an income of £200 per year.[37] We do not have similar figures for Bristol, but we do know that the total number of men admitted to the freedom as merchants between 1619 and 1699 was 521 and that in these years 317 men were admitted to the Society of Merchant Venturers.[38] Membership of the Society fluctuated considerably but on average it must have been somewhere between 80 and 90.[39] The probability is that there were at any one time about 150 people who were technically merchants in that they had been admitted as such to the freedom of Bristol. The figure would be somewhat larger if we included the wealthier grocers, vintners, mercers and others who engaged in foreign trade on a large scale. The merchants thus constituted a fairly small group in relation to the total population, but the group was clearly the most powerful in the city, and it was all the more important because in Bristol it was at the top of the social pyramid.

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[35] See pp. 13–16.
[36] *Lives of the Norths*, edit. A. Jessopp, 1890, i, 156.
[37] King's table is reproduced in Peter Laslett, *The World we have lost*, pp. 32, 33.
[38] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 2.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

The foreign trade on which the wealth of English merchants was based underwent considerable fluctuations in the course of the seventeenth century.[40] Ever since the mid-sixteenth century when the great export trade in heavy English broadcloth through Antwerp ran into major difficulties, English merchants had been trying to find new markets to supplement the Netherlands and northern Europe. They turned their attention to the export of lighter and thinner cloths, and in the Elizabethan period the development of what were known as the New Draperies provided them with valuable export material. In the first half of the seventeenth century, there were expanding markets in Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Poland, Sweden and Turkey. The American and West Indian colonies were not yet of any great significance, but the East India Company was developing markets further afield and bringing back goods which could not only be sold in England but could be re-exported to Europe. The pattern of English trade was beginning to change, but export of woollen cloth to Europe was still the basis of English commercial wealth.

In the first half of the seventeenth century English foreign trade from time to time ran into acute difficulties, and there was a long drawn out crisis as far as the export of the traditional woollen cloths was concerned. Wars, including Civil War, added to the problems of the merchants. England was slowly adjusting her economy, but, as Charles Wilson puts it, "her economic pains were growing pains",[41] and in the period after 1660 there were much more dramatic changes. Indeed, the hundred years or so after 1660 have been described by one economic historian as a Commercial Revolution which preceded the Industrial Revolution of the later eighteenth century.[42] Exports increased from about 2½–£3 million in 1640 to about £4½ million in 1700. Cloth exports expanded, but the most remarkable feature was the growth of re-exports which went up from an insignificant amount to about £2 million. These included not only goods brought back by the East India Company, but also imports from the West Indian and American colonies which were at long last in a position to send large quantities of merchandise to England – particularly tobacco and sugar. In return, they took English manufactured goods of all kinds and negro slaves. The

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[40] B. E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England 1600–1642*, Cambridge, 1959; Charles Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship 1603–1763*, fourth impression, 1971; Ralph Davis, *A Commercial Revolution: English Overseas Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Historical Association, 1962.

[41] Charles Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[42] Ralph Davis, *op. cit.*

Government developed a complicated economic policy to ensure that foreigners were excluded from this new commercial empire and that colonial produce was channelled through England. Some brief comment must be made on Bristol's part in these changes.

In 1611–12, 131 ships took on cargoes in Bristol. Of these, 61 went to Ireland, 31 to France, 27 to Spain and Portugal, and the rest to a variety of places including Amsterdam, the Azores, the Canaries, the Channel Islands and Emden.[43] In 1686–7, 240 ships left Bristol. No less than 56 of these were bound for the West Indies and 14 for America. Ireland accounted for 60 ships, France for 47 and Spain for 25.[44] Bristol was playing a very important part in the Commercial Revolution, and she was geographically well-placed to do so because of her favourable situation in relation to the West Indies and America. She was a collecting and distributing centre for a great regional trade. She supplied a large area with goods from Europe and the New World, and she exported in return the products of her own industries and of the areas with which she dealt, notably the cloths produced in the west country. She was, it is true, excluded from the East India trade, and the trade in African slaves was closed to her until 1698, but she prospered with what she had and battled hard to get more.

The economic changes of the seventeenth century presented the Society of Merchant Venturers with many challenges both at local and at national level. In the Elizabethan period, they had failed to exploit the privileges given them by their charters, but after the reorganisation of 1605 they consolidated their position and directed their energies to developing the commerce of a city which by the end of the century became the second port in the kingdom.

[43] McGrath, *Merchants and Merchandise in Seventeenth-Century Bristol*, Bristol Record Society, xix, 1955, p. 279.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

CHAPTER 4

Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Seventeenth Century

THE seventeenth century was the great formative period in the history of the Society during which it built up its organisation, became involved in a great variety of activities, and probably enjoyed more authority in the city than at any other time in its history.[1]

In order to achieve its objectives and to make sure that it did not again suffer the setbacks of the Elizabethan period, the Society had to put its own house in order. The charters of 1552 and 1566 had given it a Master and two Wardens and the right to make ordinances, but when it was reconstituted by the Corporation at the end of 1605, it was, as far as we know, without any effective administrative machinery. If it made any rules or ordinances in the period 1552–1605, they have not survived. It was not, apparently, until 1618 that it got down to the task of drawing up a comprehensive constitution and starting a register of members. On 6 July of that year, a small committee under the able leadership of the Master, John Barker, was authorised to examine the existing rules and to frame new ones "for the better government of the commynalty...."[2] What emerged was a series of ordinances, preserved in the Society's first *Book of Charters*, which were approved on 16 November 1618. All members were required to read them and to subscribe their names to show that they accepted them.[3]

The Ordinances of 1618 defined the duties of the Master, Wardens and Treasurer, and established for the first time 12 assistants. These officers, who were to be elected annually, constituted the executive body. They were to meet as often as they pleased in the Hall "and there Kepe Courte, discourse, treate of, and conclude the matters, dealinges, and business of the saide Societie, and therein give order and sett directions for the good and benefitt of the saide Societie in such manner, and to such purpose as in theire wisedomes shall seeme moste Convenient".[4] A Court of Assistants or a General Court of the whole Society could be called at the discretion of the Master and wardens. There were fines for non-attendance, for coming late and for leaving early. Nothing was to be concluded unless there were present the Master, the two wardens and at least seven of the assistants. Elaborate rules were laid down about precedence, procedure in debates and preserving confidentiality.

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[1] For a more detailed examination of its work than is possible here, see Patrick McGrath, *Records relating to the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xvii, 1952; John Latimer, *The History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol*, Bristol, 1903.

[2] *Book of Charters I*, 61; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 8. There had been earlier ordinances. In 1612, a committee of Common Council had been asked to report on them to the next meeting of the Council, but it did not in fact report (Bristol Record Office: *C.C.P., 1608–1627*, fo. 25; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 7.

[3] *Book of Charles I*, 61; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 7–8. The ordinances are transcribed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 68–80.

The duties of Treasurer included attending every court, keeping the money and presenting accounts for audit at the end of his year of office. He was to keep a confidential register of any offences against the ordinances which were reported to him, and he was to receive from the Beadle fines from absentees as well as the wharfage, keyage and plankage duties collected by the Beadle. A fine of £10 could be imposed on any member who was chosen Treasurer and who refused to act.

The Clerk was to be diligent in attending the officers and was to be honest and courteous in his behaviour to members. He was to keep a record of all acts passed by the Society "incontinent after they bee concluded".[5] It was perhaps a compliment to his literary ability that he was allowed to "amend the phrase or enditinge, by takeing, adding or altering any Wordes, soe as the meaninge bee not altered. . . ." He had to read the Minutes twice, once at the end of the meeting and a second time at the beginning of the next meeting. He had also to keep a register of apprentices. His yearly salary was £4.

The Beadle was to carry out diligently the orders of the wardens and Treasurer, summon members to court, keep a note of absentees and latecomers, collect fines, and report offences against the ordinances. He was to collect keyage, plankage and other duties, and to account for them to the Treasurer. His salary was £6 13s. 4d. a year, and he was also allowed 2s. in every pound on fines from absentees and late-comers.

Since the Society hoped to monopolise the whole of the foreign trade of Bristol,[6] it was necessary to regulate membership. No retailer or artificer was to be admitted without approval by a special Court called for that purpose. Sons and apprentices of members, provided they were at least 21 years of age and exercised no other occupation, could be admitted on payment of 4s. 6d. to the

[4] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 72. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 70. [6] See pp. 10–16.

Treasurer, 6d. to the Clerk and 4d. to the Beadle. Sons of redemptioners, that is those who had been admitted on payment of an entry fine, could become members on payment of 40s. and the usual fee to the officers. Apprentices must have served at least seven years, and the Clerk was to keep a record of all indentures.

In order to make things more difficult for non-members, whom the Society was trying to exclude completely from foreign trade, the ordinances laid down that no member or his agents should act in partnership with a non-member or his agents, or "colour"[7] the goods of any retailer or artificer.

The rules for admission laid down in 1618 differed considerably from those which the Common Council had laid down in 1605. There is nothing to suggest that the Ordinances were submitted for approval to the Corporation. Evidently, the Society now stood on its own feet.

Further constitutional developments took place in 1639 when the Society secured from Charles I its third Charter, and then drew up elaborate new ordinances.[8] On 7 January of that year, Charles I confirmed the letters patent of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, and, presumably at the request of the Society, reduced the number of assistants from 12 to 10. The election of officers was to take place on 10 November each year.[9] The Master named in the Charter (Humphrey Hooke) was to take his oath of office before the Mayor and Aldermen, but in future officers were to be sworn in by the outgoing Master and wardens.

The Charter of 1639 made much more explicit the powers given to the Society for the control of the foreign trade of Bristol. The Society was authorised by the King to make ordinances "for the good rule ordering surveying search and correcion of the Mistery or Art aforesaid and of all the works wares goods and merchandizes which the same Master Wardens and Comminalty and their Successors or any other merchants or other persons whatsoever of the City aforesaid adventuring beyond the Seas shall export or import out of or into the Realm of England or Dominion of Wales As also of all men and Merchants of the City aforesaid and their Servants Factors Apprentices and Agents . . . trading as well in the said City as in parts beyond the Seas".[10] The Society could levy fines on all who broke its Ordinances, provided such Ordinances were reasonable and not repugnant to the laws and customs of the realm, or to the prejudice of the Mayor of Bristol or the Merchant Adventurers trading to Holland, Zealand, Brabant, Flanders and other parts.[11]

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[7] Pretend that they were his.

[8] The Charter, 7 Jan. 1639, is printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 88–97; the ordinances of 4 April 1639 are printed on pp. 98–105.

[9] Hitherto the date had not been fixed, and elections between 1605 and 1638 had been held at various dates in October, November or December (McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 54, n. 1.)

[10] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 89.

The Ordinances of 4 April 1639, to which members were required to subscribe, made some further changes in organisation. The choice of Master in future to be limited to those who had previously served as Master, Warden or Assistant. A quorum at meetings was to be a majority of the assistants, the Master and one warden (instead of two, as in the 1618 Ordinances). Every member, either in person or by deputy, was to appear at each quarterly court to pay a quateridge of 4d. The duties of clerk and beadle were to be performed by one person at a salary of £8 a year.

Regulations designed to hamper non-members engaged in foreign trade were further elaborated. Merchant Venturers were not to receive from them any goods to carry beyond the seas, or to buy goods abroad for the profit of non-members. No Merchant Venturer was to lade any ship in Bristol with the goods of non-members, or put his own goods on the ship of an outsider in a foreign port if a ship laden by a Merchant Venturer was available. The goods of strangers arriving in Bristol, if worth more than £200, were to be taken to Spicer's Hall. The Society was then to meet and appoint four men to bargain for the goods and to proportion them out among members.

In addition, the Ordinances of 1639 contained detailed regulations affecting mariners and shipping, and an effort was made to prevent ships' crews trading on their own account without paying freight.

Towards the end of the year in which these new and comprehensive Ordinances were drawn up, there was passed a new regulation concerning the Master. Henceforward, he was to be chosen from three names, one presented by the retiring Master, one by the Wardens and Assistants, and one by the commonalty.[12] It is not known what lay behind this decision, which restricted in some degree the freedom of choice of members and which suggests a tendency towards oligarchy on the lines already existing in the government of the city.

The Society obtained two other charters in the seventeenth century. The Charter of 1643, granted at a time when Bristol was in the King's hands, gave the Merchant Venturers the right to trade to the areas monopolised by the Eastland Company, the Merchant Adventurers of England and the Levant Company.[13] The Charter of 1665 was merely an exemplification of the Charter of 1643.[14]

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[11] The Merchant Adventurers of England.

[12] *H.B.1*, p. 15, 11 Nov. 1639; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 55.

[13] Printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 106–7.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 109–10.

Neither of these was significant as far as the organisation of the Society was concerned.[15]

The efficiency of the Society obviously depended a great deal on the efficiency of the masters, wardens, treasurer and assistants who formed the executive and policy-making body. A study of their work leaves one with the general impression that a large number of able men held these positions and gave effective leadership. They were committed men in the sense that, although they did not hold permanent appointments or receive any salary, the interests of the Society were very much bound up with their own interests as merchants. At times during its long history, the Society has tended to be run by a relatively small group, but in the seventeenth century a considerable proportion of members held high office. Rather more than half the members between 1620 and 1700 served as assistants, and from 1605 to 1700 there were 155 different wardens, of whom only 26 held office more than once.[16] The treasurership was held by one member for ten years and by two others for six years each, but even in this key position there were repeated changes, with the result that there were 61 different treasurers between 1605 and 1700. In the same period, 67 different individuals occupied the Master's chair. Humphrey Hooke created a record by being Master no less than seven times, and Hugh Browne and Joseph Jackson both held the office four times, but they were exceptional. Only 15 others were elected more than once.

The policy-making and executive body of the Society was the Court of Assistants, consisting after 1639 of the Master, two Wardens and 10 Assistants. There was an attempt to make it more efficient in 1664 when a motion was carried at a General Hall stating that "there have bene many meetings appoynted and the Company warned to meete at the Haule which have bin often tymes refused and neglected, And for want of appearance nothinge hath bin done in order to the businesse of the Haule upon such a summons . . .". It was ordered that "for the better carrying on the businesse of the Haule for this next yeare", the Master, Wardens, Assistants, Treasurer and Clerk should meet on 10 February, 10 May and 10 August in addition to other meetings, and should have a dinner provided at not above 4s. per head.[17]

Early in 1699 occurred the first definite reference to the Standing Committee which is still the chief policy-making body in the Society. On 17 January 1699, it was "voted and ordered that the Master

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[15] These charters will be noted in connection with the Society's attempt to break the monopolies of the London-controlled companies (see pp. 50–1).

[16] For a list of Masters, Wardens and Treasurers see Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 326 ff.

[17] *H.B.3*, 10 Nov. 1664.

Wardens and Assistants or the major number of them be a Standing Committee to transact all matters relateing to the Hall and any member that pleaseth to be present and act with them. . . ."[18] This was, of course, basically the old Court of Assistants under another name.

The officers were assisted by a small paid staff consisting principally of the Clerk and the Beadle whose duties were defined in the Ordinances.[19] The Clerk at this time was not a lawyer but simply a man who looked after the office work and kept the records. His salary was originally only £4 a year, later raised to £10. He received less than the Beadle and was presumably engaged in the work only part-time.[20] The Beadle collected the Society's rents, made payments to the alms people, disbursed money for building and repairs, and looked after the Society's property. His salary in 1618 was £6 13s. 4d. a year, but in 1699 it was raised to £20 a year.[21] The Society also had at various times during the century an Assistant Clerk, a Collector of Hall Duties, and a Collector of Wharfage,[22] but the salaried officers do not seem to have been more than three at any one time. There were only three Clerks between 1618 and the end of the century, and this suggests that the Society began early its practice of securing and retaining an efficient administrative staff.

When the Society first started its Register of Members in 1618, 72 names were recorded. Between 1619 and 1699 the Register shows 317 admissions, but to this must be added 26 admissions between 1639 and 1651 which appear in the *Hall Book* but not in the Register, making a total of 343.[23] Apprenticeship and patrimony were the commonest methods of entry, but there was a considerable number of redemptioners paying an entry fee. Between 1639 and 1699, more than a quarter of the members came in by this method.[24] There was no fixed admission fine, and, generally speaking, for the first three-quarters of the century fines were under £20. For the last quarter, fines of £25 and £30 were normal. Sir John Duddlestone's fine of £40 in 1691 was exceptional and seems to have been the largest paid by any member in the seventeenth century.[25] In the years 1619–99, the number of people admitted to the freedom of Bristol as merchants was 521[26] as compared with 330 admitted to the Society in the same period.[27] Clearly, a considerable number of merchants did not become members of the Society,[28] but this does not seem to have been due to any attempt on the part of the Merchant Venturers to limit entry. The fact that many redemptioners were admitted, that entry fines were kept low and that petitions for admission were rarely rejected suggests that the Society was anxious to recruit all merchants, provided they agreed to exercise only the trade of a merchant and did not engage in the retail business.[29]

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[18] *H.B.3*, 17 Jan. 1699.

[19] For the 1618 Ordinances, see Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 70, 71. For the 1639 Ordinances, *ibid.*, p. 99.

[20] For further details about the Clerk, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers* where there are a considerable number of references.

[21] For further references to the Beadle, see McGrath, *op. cit.*

[22] McGrath, *op. cit.*

[23] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 27 for a transcription of the Register, p. 261 for the 26 names recorded in the *Hall Book*.

[24] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[25] McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 51.

Most of the thirteen honorary members were admitted because they were influential people who might be of use to the Society or who were important locally. One of them, however, was the Society's Beadle and this was in recognition of good service.[30]

In 1618 the Society had a membership of 72, but during the century the number fluctuated considerably. There was a drop from 83 in January 1645 to 57 in May 1649. The figure rose to 73 in 1652, to 78 in 1659, and to 99 in 1671. In the last decade, it stood in the nineties, but the hundred mark was not reached.[31]

The headquarters of the Society was the Merchants' Hall in King Street, which had once been the Chapel of St. Clement. It was a plain, simple building in which meetings were held and the records kept. Two inventories, one of 1631 and the other of 1697, show that the contents of the Hall and inner room included a number of tables and forms, various coats of arms, a list of benefactors, a chest with three locks "wherein are the Charters and other writinges", candlesticks, chamber pots, stools and cushions. The walls were wainscotted in 1624 when it was ordered that the Audit Dinner should be held in the Hall. The inventory of 1697 mentions six portraits of benefactors, "a tree of knowledge in a frame", and a plan of the manor of Clifton. We are left with the general impression of business-like austerity. Although money was spent on the Hall from time to time, it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that a local chronicler recorded "This year the Merchants Rebuilt their Hall, and have made it the most convenient and beautiful of any in the City."[32]

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[26] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[27] The *total* number of admissions was 343, but 13 of these were Honorary Members who were not merchants.

[28] If one adds the large-scale retailers who were for all practical purposes also merchants engaged in foreign trade, the number is much larger.

[29] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[30] The Honorary Members admitted in the seventeenth century were: Major-General Skippon and Major-General Harrison (1651), Mr. Thomas Stevens (1665), the Marquis of Worcester (1673), Lord George Berkeley (1674), William Mors the Beadle (1674), Sir John Churchill (1676), John Romsey, Town Clerk (1676), Edward Cranfield (1681), Charles Lord Herbert (1681), Lord Arthur Somerset (1681), James Earl of Ossory (1685), Nathaniel Haggat, Steward of the Sheriff's Court (1690). See McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 31–3, 261.

[31] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

In order to carry out the many tasks which it set itself in the course of the century, the Society needed not only efficient organisation but an adequate income. Throughout the period, its resources were small in relation to its commitments, but it managed to achieve a remarkable amount on a shoe-string budget.

In the earliest surviving account, that of 1610–11, receipts amounted to less than £150, and it is unlikely that they ever exceeded £200 a year before 1660. In the post-Restoration years, there was more money available, and in the last decade of the century, the Society's income seems to have been between £700 and £800 a year. Against this, there were considerable recurrent charges, and capital expenditure on property and port improvement was possible only because the Society could raise loans without much difficulty.[33]

The most important source of income was wharfage. This was first imposed by the Corporation in 1606 as a charge on goods imported into Bristol.[34] At first the Society collected it on behalf of the city, but from 1611, apparently by an informal arrangement, it kept the money for its own use. The Society tried unsuccessfully to obtain a formal lease in 1624, but it did not get one until 1661.[35] In 1614–15, the duty brought in less than £100, but in the post-Restoration years it averaged a little over £400 a year. The Society also collected miscellaneous port dues such as anchorage, keyage and plankage, but they brought in considerably less than £100 a year.[36]

There was no annual subscription to the Society and although the Ordinances of 1639 made provision for the payment of quarterage at the rate of 4d. a quarter,[37] there is no record of it ever being collected. Apprentices and sons of redemptioners had to pay certain small fees, and for redemptioners there was an entry fine. In the seventeenth century, the Society did not exploit this potential source of income to anything like the same extent it did in the eighteenth century. In 1690, for example, the total receipts from fines from four

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[32] For the inventory and other details about the Hall, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 66 ff.

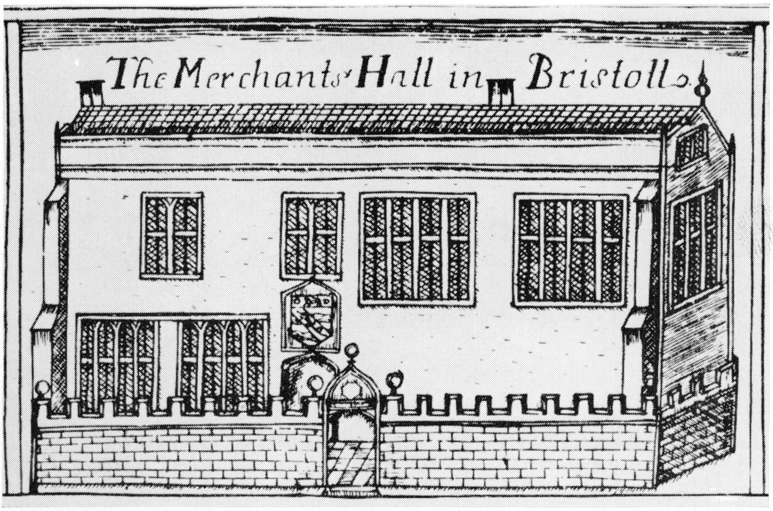
[33] For further examination of the Society's finances and specimens of the accounts, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. xxv–xxviii, 81–95.

[34] For wharfage, see a number of references in McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 64–5; *Seventeenth Century Annals*, pp. 28, 306, 438. See also *infra*, pp. 71–2.

[35] Bristol Record Office: C.T.D. 00352(4). There is another copy in the Merchants' Hall. See McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 136.

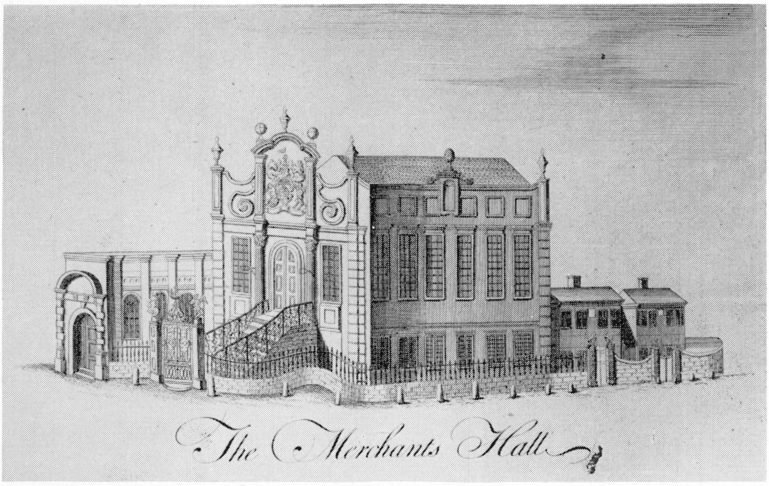
[36] For further details, see McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. xxvi.

[37] *Supra*, p. 42.


The Merchants Hall in Bristoll.

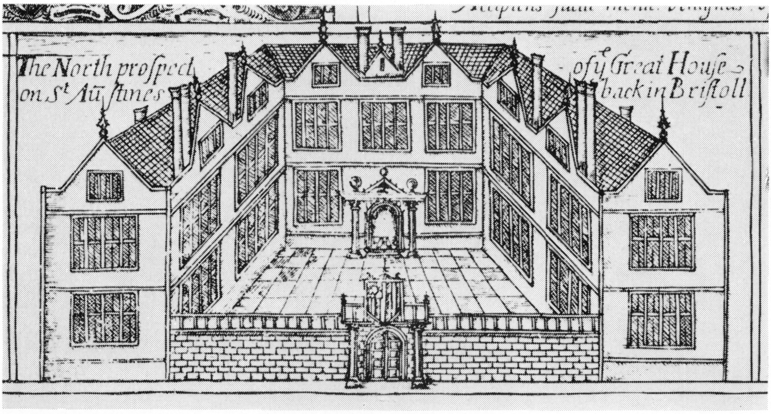
The old Merchants' Hall, originally the chapel of St. Clement, as it was in the seventeenth century. From James Millerd's Plan of Bristol, 1673.

Photograph by G. Kelsey


The Merchants Hall

The Merchants' Hall as it was in 1789. From a print in the Hall.

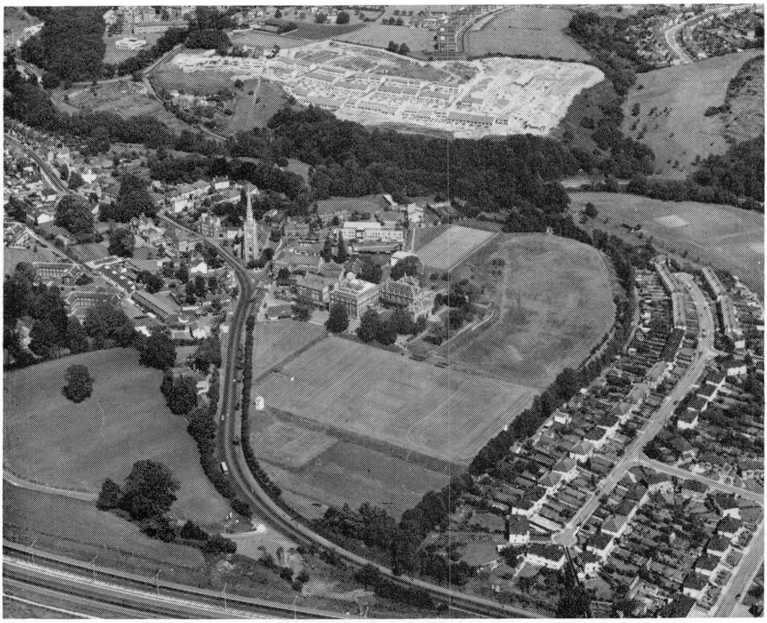
Photograph by G. Kelsey


The North prospect of ye Great House
on St Austines back in Bristoll

Above: The Great House on St. Augustine's Back occupied by Colston's Hospital from 1710 until the school moved to Stapleton in 1851. From James Millerd's Plan of Bristol, 1673.

Photograph by G. Kelsey

Below: Aerial photograph of Colston's School, Stapleton, at the present day.



Photograph by courtesy of West Air Photography (Weston-super-Mare) redemptioners amounted to only £100.[38] At this stage, the Society was anxious to encourage merchants to join and kept the entry fine low.

In the last quarter of the century, the Society acquired a considerable part of the manor of Clifton and a certain amount of other property in Bristol. Rents from these sources amounted to between £150 and £200 a year, and from time to time there were capital gains from renewal of leases, such as £200 received from a house on the quay, £120 from a house in the Castle and over £500 from the George Inn.[39]

From its limited income, the Society had to meet a great many expenses. Defence of the interests of the merchants was a costly and recurring charge, involving the payment of agents sent to London, fees to lawyers and presents to those likely to be useful. A great deal was spent on routine maintenance of the port and on conservation of the river. The Society's Hall and other property had to be kept in repair. There were salaries and gifts for the Clerk, the Beadle, the Collector of Hall Dues, the schoolmaster and the clergymen who preached in St. Stephen's Church on Charter Day and who attended the almspeople or officiated in the chapel at Shirehampton.[40] From 1670, the Society paid the salary of the Havenmaster.[41] Charitable gifts and pensions were another item, and the Beadle's Accounts show payment of over £100 a year to almsfolk and pensioners in the last decade of the century.[42] The cost of the audit dinner rose from a modest £6 2s. in 1617 to much larger sums later in the century. When the Duke of Beaufort was made Lord Lieutenant in 1672, the Society spent nearly £80 in entertaining him.[43]

Capital expenditure was on occasions very high. In 1621 the Society had to make a contribution of £1,000 towards the cost of a naval expedition against the pirates of North Africa,[44] and it spent over £2,500 in extending and improving the quays in the years 1661–3 and 1690–3.[45] The purchase of a three-quarter share of the manor of Clifton cost £1,750 in 1676, and £911 15s. was spent on buying further property there in 1699.[46] Cost of work on the road to Rownham and the Hotwell amounted to nearly £350 in 1688,[47] and in the last decade of the century rebuilding and extending the Merchants' Almshouse involved considerable expenditure.[48]

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[38] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. xxvi.

[39] Merchants' Hall Records: *Treasurer's Book 2*, 68; McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. xxvi.

[40] For details of these and other expenses, see McGrath, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

[41] *Infra*, pp. 75–6.

[42] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii.

[43] For Dinners, Hospitality and Presents, see McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–80.

[44] Patrick McGrath, "The Merchant Venturers and Bristol Shipping in the early seventeenth century", *Mariners' Mirror*, vol. xxxvi, no. 1, 1950.

[45] For further details of expenditure on the port, see Patrick McGrath, "The Society of Merchant Venturers and the Port of Bristol in the 17th Century", *Trans. B.G.A.S.* lxxii, 1953.

[46] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 131, 132; Merchants' Hall Records: *Treasurer's Book 2*, 35, 69.

As far as organisation and finance were concerned, the Society could look back with satisfaction on its progress during the seventeenth century. It had worked out a constitution for itself and created an efficient administrative machinery. It had started with little or no financial resources and, thanks very largely to the Corporation, it had acquired an income. In the years after 1660, it had bought quite a lot of property. It had used used its resources to provide a fighting fund with which to defend the merchants' interests, it had done much to develop the port, and it had been engaged in a great variety of other activities, including charitable and educational work. If it owed everything in the first place to the financial help received from the Corporation, it had in return given Bristol good value for money.

[47] Merchants' Hall Records: *Beadle's Book 1*, 10, 11.

[48] See p. 82.

CHAPTER 5

The Work of the Society in the Seventeenth Century

LIKE all other professional associations in this period, the Society of Merchant Venturers was concerned first of all with furthering the interests of its own members at local and national level. Those interests were not necessarily identical with the interests of other groups in the city, and this to some extent explains why the Society did not achieve one of its main objectives – the establishment of a closed shop for its members in foreign trade. But apart from this, there was considerable justification in the seventeenth century for the view that what was good for the Society was good for Bristol. The Merchant Venturers formed a powerful pressure group which defended its own and the city's interests at the Council table and in parliament and which battled with success against competing interests elsewhere, notably in London. Unless there had been some such organisation, the voice of Bristol would have been drowned in the clamour raised by other groups in other ports.

THE ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A MONOPOLY IN FOREIGN TRADE

In seventeenth-century England, there were many individuals and many groups seeking to secure commercial or industrial monopolies. Much ingenuity was shown in producing arguments to prove that such monopolies were in the public interest, and people did not see any inconsistency in seeking privileges for themselves while at the same time attacking the privileges granted to others. Every would-be monopolist thought that his was a special case. It is not therefore surprising to find the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol making continual efforts in the seventeenth century to restrict the foreign trade of Bristol to its own members, and at the same time protesting that the monopolistic practices of others were "contrary to the lawes of the kingdome, the benifitt of the Commonwealth, the increase of his Maiesties Customes, humane Society, yea against the Rules of Christianity".[1]

The Society based its claim on the charters of 1552 and 1566, which had been confirmed by an Act of Parliament in 1566.[2] It forgot, or ignored, the Act of 1571, which had explicitly repealed the Act of 1566 and implicitly rejected the exclusive rights granted by the charters. Nor was it discouraged by an Act of Parliament of 1606 directed against the Spanish and French Companies, which declared that the Spanish, Portuguese and French trades were open to all the King's subjects.[3] Its attempt to get its charters excepted from this Act failed,[4] but if parliament was unwilling to help, the Corporation of Bristol was more sympathetic, and in 1612, ignoring the Act of Parliament, it authorised the Society to make ordinances by virtue of its charters forbidding its own members from exercising any other trade, and prohibiting non-members from using the trade of a merchant adventurer.[5] It was impossible to enforce such regulations in view of the Act of Parliament opening the Spanish, Portuguese and French trades to everyone, and the Society's Ordinances of 1618 which forbade members to handle the goods of retailers or artificers implicitly recognised that such people were engaged in foreign trade.[6] In order to exclude them, it was essential to get parliamentary backing, and determined efforts were made in the parliaments of 1621 and 1624. Legal advice was taken from the Recorder, the city gave enthusiastic support, and there was much correspondence with the M.P.s who were themselves Merchant Venturers. A variety of ingenious arguments was put forward, but in neither parliament was a bill actually brought in. At a time when monopolies were under heavy fire, it would have stood little chance of success.[7]

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[1] *Book of Trade*, p. 70; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 220–1.

The Charter which the Society obtained from the King in 1639[8] gave it wide powers over everyone in Bristol exercising the art of a merchant, but the revised ordinances which the Society drew up made no attempt to compel all merchants to become members. They merely forbade Merchant Venturers from cooperating with outsiders.[9] Latimer suggested that the Society did not attempt to establish a closed shop because the Charter of 1639 did not allow it to make Ordinances contrary to the law of the land. He argued that any such regulation would have violated the Act of 1606 which opened the French, Spanish and Portuguese trades to all subjects of the crown. This explanation is not satisfactory, for the King himself

[2] See pp. 13–14.

[3] *Statutes of the Realm*, iv, part ii, 1083.

[4] *Journals of the House of Commons*, i, 275; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 6.

[5] Bristol Record Office: *C.C.P. 1608–1627*, 24v, 25; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, xvii, 6–7.

[6] *Supra*, p. 41.

[7] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. xviii, 8–14.

[8] *Supra* p. 41.

[9] *Supra* p. 41.

had ignored the Act of 1606 when he established a new French Company in 1611,[10] and the Act had not prevented the Corporation of Bristol from authorising the Society to make Ordinances limiting trade to its own members in 1612. It would not in any case have prevented the Merchant Venturers from trying to exclude non-members from trades not covered by the Act. The probability is that in 1639 the Society decided that for the time being it could not enforce the monopoly granted in its charters unless it had parliamentary authority, and this it had so far failed to obtain.

After the Restoration, it tried again. In 1662, it brought in a bill to confirm its charters, but this was rejected on its second reading.[11] In 1665, it set up a committee to petition the King to confirm the Charters and also to obtain an Act of Parliament confirming them.[12] Charles II did in fact confirm his father's grant of 1639,[13] but little progress was made in parliament. Further attempts were made between 1667 and 1670 to get the charters confirmed and the privileges of the Society increased, but these laborious and costly efforts were unsuccessful, and the Society finally abandoned the hopeless task.[14]

It was fortunate that the Society of Merchant Venturers failed to establish a monopoly of the foreign trade of Bristol. If it had succeeded, it would probably have found itself engaged in fierce conflict with other Bristolians, and a monopoly would probably have put the brake on commercial expansion. It was in its own best interest that it should be compelled to attract members, not by coercion but by offering them the material advantages and the considerable prestige of belonging to a powerful and influential organisation which worked in the closest harmony with the city government.

THE SOCIETY AS A CHAMPION OF "FREE TRADE"

Although the Society wanted to establish a local monopoly, it was determined to oppose monopolies held by others, and it became deeply involved in the nation-wide debate on how foreign trade could best be organized. The points at issue were many and varied. Was foreign trade to be carried on only by professional, trained merchants, or was it to be open to all? Should some overseas markets be the monopoly of particular groups? If trade was to be controlled, should control be vested in regulated or in joint-stock companies? What contributions, if any, should be levied on merchants in order to maintain the services necessary for the smooth working of trade? What was to be done if the interests of merchants conflicted with those of industrialists or of consumers? Should special consideration be given to the needs of the provinces in order to prevent them being ruined by the over-mighty capital? Was the economic growth in Ireland or in the colonies to be allowed to threaten vested interests in England? To what extent should political considerations and national security take precedence over economic advancement? Such questions were discussed passionately, and by no means disinterestedly, by all who traded overseas. Throughout the century, a number of pressure groups, of which the Society of Merchant Venturers was one, sought continually to move in one direction or another the frontiers of economic controls. They strove to catch the eye of the Council and of Parliament. They fought for their own interests, but they adapted their position and their arguments to the need of the moment, and they did not worry unduly about consistency.

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[10] C. T. Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies, 1530–1707*, Selden Society, xxviii, 1913, pp. 62 ff.

[11] *Journals of the House of Commons*, viii, 340; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 15.

[12] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 16.

[13] 23 June 1665. Printed in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 109–10.

[14] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 15–26; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 107–109.

The volume of foreign trade going through London was overwhelmingly greater than that of the provincial ports, and a number of Companies in which Londoners predominated managed to secure from the King monopolies in important overseas markets. These Companies tended either to exclude outsiders or, more usually, to impose on them conditions of trade which they found irksome. Thus, disputes about commercial policy were in no small measure disputes between London and the out-ports. Bristolians were naturally heavily engaged and fought with distinction on a number of fronts. They contributed in good measure to the volume of complaint against the dominant Londoners. Thus, at the end of the sixteenth century, they protested that whereas they had once enjoyed "free and unrestrained traffique into the streights", now "this our Trade have the Londoners intercepted and so monopoled into themselves, as wee are inforced (yf wee trade thither) to compound therefore at verie neare a quarter parte".[15] On another occasion, they remarked that a London merchant who was concerned with patent to export butter was behaving "as if God had noe sonnes to whom he gave the benefitt of the earth but in London".[16] The battle continued throughout the century, and one of the most important contributions of the Society to the city which had given it so privileged a position was to act as a permanent, and often very effective, watchdog over the interests of Bristol. It had the knowledge and the resources to prepare arguments to present to the Council or to Parliament, and it knew how to win friends and influence people.

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[15] *Book of Trade*, pp. 136 ff. They were referring to the Levant or Turkey Company.

[16] *Book of Trade*, p. 83 (1621).

The battlefield was continually shifting as a new enemy appeared or as an old one returned to the struggle, and often the Society had to fight on several fronts at the same time. It is best to examine the conflicts separately rather than chronologically, and only a limited amount of detail can be given here about what was, from the Society's point of view, the most important task it had to perform in the seventeenth century.

In the first half of the period, the Iberian peninsula was probably the most important market for Bristolians. Under Elizabeth I, this had been handed over to a Spanish Company, and Bristolians who wanted to trade there had been compelled to join it. They had, as we have seen, decided to separate from it in 1605, and an Act of Parliament of 1606 had thrown the trade open to all.[17] But there was a danger that the Spanish Company might be revived, and a number of attempts were made to persuade the King to grant a new Charter. In 1631, for example, the Privy Council wrote to the merchants of Bristol informing them that the merchants of London trading to Spain had petitioned for the incorporation of a company "for the preventinge of those great disorders and inconveniences that have growne heretofore by a loose manner of trade, not subject to government . . .". Bristolians were instructed to send two or more fit persons to London to discuss the proposal. The argument about disorders arising from a "loose manner of trade" was the stock argument of those who wanted a monopoly for themselves. It had been used by the Merchant Venturers of Bristol when they applied for a charter in 1552, but they had already experienced the inconvenience of being controlled by a London-dominated Spanish Company, and they had no desire to see it revived. Fortunately for them the Government decided against the London merchants.[18]

Battle was also joined with the Londoners early in the century when some of them combined with the Drapers' Company of Shrewsbury in an attempt to corner the market in Welsh cloth. In 1620, the Society wrote to Mr. Guy, who had gone to London on its behalf, commending the efforts he had made to resist "the uncivill practizes and projectes which you advertize us are nowe in hande" and praising his "vertuous Resolucion to oppose and Crushe in the shell these cacatrices". The Society was confident that the Privy

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[17] Pauline Croft, *The Spanish Company*, London Record Society, 1973, xliv–xlvi.

[18] There were a number of attempts in the early seventeenth century to revive the Spanish Company. For further details, see V. M. Shillington and A. B. Chapman, *The Commercial Relations of England and Portugal*, pp. 146–76; E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, 1947, ii, 264–6; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 212–13.

Council would "never entertaine or admitt such oppression".[19] Its confidence on this occasion was justified, and the trade was eventually thrown open.[20]

France was another market which Bristolians wanted to keep open. The trade had been made free to all the King's subjects by an Act of 1606, but a number of difficulties arose, and the Lord Treasurer, the Earl of Salisbury, was willing to listen to the arguments of those who urged that the merchants should be organised for self-protection. In 1609, he invited a number of west-country ports and towns to express their views. The Mayor of Bristol, John Butcher, who was a Merchant Venturer, reported that the merchants had discussed the matter in their Common Hall and were strongly against regulation of the trade by a Company. The merchants agreed that any such grant would be a violation of their charters which had been confirmed by Act of Parliament.[21] They made pointed remarks about "the pollitique devises of the Merchantes of London, who for their own singular gaine, doe alwaies seeke to suppresse our charteres and priviledges for trade of Merchandize. . . ."[22] But in spite of provincial opposition, the French Company was incorporated in 1611. Two hundred and one out of its 530 members were London merchants.[23] No Bristol merchants joined, presumably because they did not wish to do so, and it is unlikely that the Company was able to limit the French trade to its own members. Those who did not join could argue that an Act of Parliament gave them the right to trade to France.

Nevertheless, the existence of the French Company worried the Society of Merchant Venturers. The issue was very much alive in 1632 and 1633 when the debate turned on two issues, whether or not the trade should be controlled by a company, and whether the merchants of the various towns engaged in it should contribute to the compensation demanded by the French for damage done to their merchants. Representatives of the various interested towns were sent to London where the Government referred the question of compensation to a committee consisting of four London merchants and four from the outports. By exercising a certain amount of pressure, the Bristol merchants managed to get one of their own number and a man from Plymouth added to the committee. The Bristol representative reported that the Exeter merchants were prepared to contribute to the payment of compensation and also agreed that the trade should be regulated. They thought they themselves would have to give way over the matter of compensation, since the other western ports were prepared to pay between them £1,000. The Society sharply told its representatives to keep to their instructions and not to consent. In the end, the Bristol merchants agreed to provide £50. The pass had been sold by the Exeter merchants to whom the French trade was very important. But if they lost on the issue of compensation, the Bristolians had the satisfaction of seeing the attempt to regulate the trade end in failure.[24] Nor did anything come of a proposal made in 1633 by the Exeter merchants that the merchants of the north and east should be under the control of London and those of the west under the control of Exeter.[25]

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[19] *Book of Trade*, p. 70, 20 Feb. 1620; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 220–1.

[20] For details of the complicated issues, see T. C. Mendenhall, *The Shrewsbury Drapers and the Welsh Wool Trade in the XVI and XVII Centuries*, Oxford, 1953.

[21] The Act of 1571 repealing the Act of 1566 confirming the charters was forgotten or ignored. See p. 16 and n. 19.

[22] P.R.O. *S.P. 14/45, no. 106,* 7 June 1609. For some useful notes on the French Company, see E. Lipson, *Economic History of England*, 1947, ii, 363–4. For opposition to the French Company from Tiverton, Lyme Regis, Chard and Exeter, see *Cal. S.P.D. 1603–1610*, pp. 516, 534, 535, 537.

[23] For its Charter, see C. T. Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, pp. 62–78.

There was trouble, too, with the Levant or Turkey Company which claimed a monopoly of trade in the Levant by virtue of charters from Elizabeth I and James I.[26] The Society was anxious to secure for Bristolians at least some share in this lucrative trade. When the matter came before the Privy Council in 1618, the Bristol representatives reported back that they were under great pressure to agree to make some contribution to the Levant Company in return for the right to trade in currants. John Whitson and John Barker, the Society's representatives in London, were hampered by their instructions, since the Society had been "peremptory at the last assemblie to bee Free without lymittacion or wholy exempted". They thought it would be best to make some concession, for "it is better to incurre inconveniencie then mischiefe". They were allowed to use their discretion, and in the end Bristolians got the right to import 200 tons of currants a year from Zante and Cephalonia on condition that they paid 6s. 8d. a ton to the Levant Company.[27]

The Levant trade came up again in 1632 when the Levant Company wrote to the Society complaining that the agreed composition had not been paid for many years past. Merchants in Bristol engaged in the trade must be told that they were to pay the duty and make good the arrears. A copy of the Levant Company's regulations was also enclosed. The Society replied that it was impossible

[24] For the correspondence between the Society and its representatives, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 209–12.

[25] *Cal. S.P.D. 1633–1634*, p. 271, 1 Nov. 1633.

[26] There are a considerable number of references in the Society's records. See *Book of Trade*, pp. 51–7, 205–7, 209–11, 219–65; *H.B. 1*, pp. 370–1, 373–4, 390; *Book of Charters 1*, 57. See also Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 137–40; *Seventeenth Century Annals*, pp. 65–6, 332–3, 351–2; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 213–20.

[27] For the correspondence, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 213–15.

now to collect arrears, but that the money would be paid in future. Bristolians would obey the Company's regulations "provided wee may receive noe preiudice thereby . . .".[28]

After the Restoration, the Society was in a stronger position. Charles I's Charter of 1643 had explicitly given to its members the right to trade to all places to which the Levant Company traded. It is true that this was a wartime measure granted by the King to the loyal Bristolians when London was in rebellion, but it remained valid and had been confirmed by Charles II in his Charter of 1665. Nevertheless, the Levant Company in the same year increased the duties on non-members and brought a number of Bristolians before the Privy Council for infringing its rights. The Society reacted vigorously and had a measure of success, since after hearing both sides, the Council decided that in future the Levant Company should not lay any imposition on the merchants of Bristol who traded to Venice and Zante for the commodities of those places.[29] Three years later the Levant Company again endeavoured to exclude Bristolians, and the Society again went into action.[30] In a case prepared for the Privy Council, it argued that its own charters were older than those of the Levant Company and that the Charter of 1643 explicitly allowed Bristolians to trade to the Levant. With a touch of rhetoric, the Society claimed that there were many rich merchants in Bristol who would invest in the trade and "adventure theire Estates on the wings of the seas fortune" if they were allowed to do so. There would be great economic and social benefits, for "where there is a full trade, Riches flowes in, and the poore wants not. . . ." Although they were would-be monopolists themselves, they pointed out that the Levant Company was a monopoly and that it was illegal under the Statute of Monopolies of 1624. The richest trade of the kingdom was in the hands of a small group of merchants, with disastrous economic consequences. Charles II was advised that the most prudent policy for the King to adopt was "to keepe Merchants of severall citties in a ballance . . . or otherwise Commerce will not only bee contracted but Monopolised to its ruine. . . ." They concluded with a moving reference to the martyred King who in 1643 had given them a Charter allowing them to trade to the Levant: " . . . who then can thinke without wonder and Amazement that there should not bee given greatest veneration and Continuance to the Charters Even of that Mirror of Kings whose goodnes transcended his Meridian greatnes, seeing hee willingly yeilded up his life in sacrifice and laid downe his neck to the Block at the Feete of his Rebellious subiects . . . for the reprivall of his Prerogative Royall and peoples birth rights from violation and vassalage."[31] Those who drew up the petition had little to learn about special pleading. It had become a question of honouring the pledges of the Royal Martyr, not of whether the merchants of Bristol should pay a duty on currants. It was a good campaign, even if it was expensive,[32] and in the end the Society seems to have succeeded in vindicating its limited rights to trade to the Levant.[33]

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[28] See McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 215–17.

[29] *Book of Trade*, p. 257; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 218.

[30] The Merchant Adventurers of England were also involved at this time in an attack on the Bristolians (McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 219 n. 2).

Another very powerful Company with which the Society had a brief encounter in the seventeenth century was the Merchant Adventurers of England, who were also known as the Hamburg Company, since Hamburg was their main depot from the early seventeenth century. This Company had the exclusive right to trade in unfinished cloth with the Netherlands and North Germany. It was the most important of all the companies for foreign trade, and it had members not only in London but in a number of provincial towns. There was often conflict between the London and provincial members, but Bristol was not normally involved, since its trade lay in other directions. Unlike York, Hull and Newcastle, Bristol had no members belonging to the Merchant Adventurers of England, and its charters explicitly excluded it from that Company's sphere of influence.[34] In 1643, Charles I's Charter gave the Bristol Society the right to trade to the areas controlled by the Merchant Adventurers of England, and this Charter was confirmed by Charles II in 1665. It seems unlikely that Bristolians were either able or willing to assert their rights, but when the Merchant Adventurers joined the Levant Company in its attack on Bristolians in 1669, the Society counter-attacked. It appealed to the Merchant Adventurers of Newcastle. The Newcastle Society, unlike the Bristol Merchant Venturers, was to some extent a branch of the Merchant Adventurers of England and shared in their privileges. It had, however, come in conflict with the main company, and Bristol hoped to get support for a proposal that all the outports should join in an attack. Although Newcastle had its grievances, it was not anxious to destroy privileges in which it shared. It suspected, probably rightly, that the Bristol Society was merely trying to get others to pay part of the cost of its case before the Privy Council, and it decided that it was "more conduceing to the common good of trade, and the mainetayninge of our generall privileggs to ioyne with the Marchants of London, rather than with these interlopers. . . ."[35] Bristol's real quarrel at this time was with its ancient enemy, the Levant Company, and the proposed joint attack on the Merchant Adventurers of England was merely a by-product of the dispute occasioned by the fact that the Merchant Adventurers were supporting the Levant Company. Latimer suggests that Bristolians succeeding in breaking the monopoly of the Merchant Adventurers,[36] but in fact the monopoly remained intact until just after the Revolution of 1688. Its destruction then did not greatly interest the merchants of Bristol, since they did not trade to any extent with the markets in question.[37]

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[31] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 19–24.

[32] Sir Richard Elsworth's expenses alone came to £182 11s. 2d., part of which was disallowed by a committee which thought he should have only £75, together with £50 for his pains.

[33] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 140.

[34] For the Bristol Society's relationship with other Merchant Adventurer organisations, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. xxx–xxxvi.

Another trade from which Bristolians were excluded was the East India trade which was the monopoly of the East India Company by virtue of a Charter of 31 December 1600. The Company conducted the trade by means of a number of separate joint-stocks. In 1650, when the Company was in difficulties, it invited Bristol and twelve other ports to invest in one of its joint-stock ventures. Only Bristol and Exeter replied, and both rejected the offer. When the letter of invitation was read in the Hall, the matter was put to the vote, and it was decided that "the said proffer may prove noe way beneficiall".[38] This was just after the execution of the King, and investors were no doubt nervous about the stability of the Government, but the Society nevertheless missed the chance of infiltrating a very lucrative market. Later, it tried to regain the lost opportunity. It voted unanimously in 1681 to join its old enemy the Levant Company and other London merchants to try to get a share in the East India trade.[39] Nothing came of this, and ten years later it set up a committee which was to meet twice a week to draw up a petition and prepare a case for "gaining a part of the East India trade to this Citty". In the petition, it argued that Bristol was "next to London for trade and commerce and capable to fitt out shipps to and from the Indies . . .". The M.P.s were asked to lobby for support and warned that "the Wealthy Citizens of London who have hetherto ingrost this profitable trade to themselves will make great head against us . . .".[40] But the monopoly was not broken, and it was perhaps as well that the Society at this time did not become too involved, for the growth of the West Indian and American trades in the post-Restoration years probably absorbed most of the spare capital available and brought Bristolians into conflict with yet another monopolistic group – the Royal Africa Company.

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[35] See F. W. Dendy, *Extracts from the Records of the Merchant Adventurers of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, Surtees Society, 1899, ii, 136–8; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 225–7.

[36] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 140.

[37] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. xxxvi.

[38] *H.B. 1*, pp. 151, 21 Feb. 1650: *A Calendar of the Court Minutes of the East India Company 1650–1654*, edit. Ethel Bruce Sainsbury, Oxford, 1913, p. 30.

[39] *H.B. 2*, p. 184; W. R. Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, Cambridge, 1910–12, I, 308, II, 139–43.

[40] *H.B. 2*, pp. 482, 487–8, 502; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 228–31.

The development of the English plantations in the New World in the post-Restoration years depended on an adequate labour force, and although this was in some degree supplied by indentured servants, of whom about 10,000 passed through the port of Bristol in the period 1654–85, the real need could be met only by negro slaves. These could be obtained by trading with Africans who supplied the slaves in return for a variety of English goods, but the monopoly of the Royal Africa Company closed the slave trade to most Englishmen.[41] The Company defended its privileges on the ground that the forts which it maintained on the African coast were essential for the proper conduct of the trade and preserved it against European competitors. In the last decade of the century, Bristolians, who were particularly interested in securing an adequate supply of cheap labour for the West Indian plantations, contributed to the growing volume of criticism directed against the monopoly of the Royal Africa Company. In 1690, the Society set up a committee to petition parliament "for letting in the merchants of this Citty to a share in the African trade".[42] In 1694, in cooperation with a number of London merchants, it maintained in a petition to parliament that "a free trade to the Coast of Affrica will carry off much greater quantities of English manufactories and imploy greater numbers of the poore of this Kingdome then when the same is confined to a particuler Company. . . ."[43] The result of a sustained attack from many quarters was that in 1698 an Act was passed allowing any subject of the Crown to trade to Africa, provided he paid certain duties on imports and exports. The duties were to be used by the Royal Africa Company to maintain its forts.[44] The Society had thus played a part in getting the slave trade officially opened to Bristolians.

Opposition to privileged London groups was widespread in the provinces in the seventeenth century, and the contribution of the Merchant Venturers of Bristol was not unique. Moreover, it would be an over-simplification of complex issues to see the struggle simply in terms of the outports against the capital. Neither the Londoners nor the provincial merchants presented a united front. London merchants were ready to solicit help from Bristol in an attack on the Royal Africa Company in the sixteen-nineties, and earlier on the Society had joined forces with its former enemy the Levant Company in an attempt to get a share in the monopoly of the East India Company. In the sixteen-thirties, the Exeter merchants would not cooperate with Bristol and other west-country ports in opposing restrictions on the French trade, and they gave enthusiastic support to some of the London merchants who wanted to bring the trade under the control of a company. In the post-Restoration period, the merchants of Newcastle rejected Bristol's suggestion of a joint attack on the Merchant Adventurers of England and defended a monopoly in which they themselves had a share. Each town was concerned with its own particular interests rather than with general principles. The Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol, which on so many occasions opposed restrictions on trade, was extremely anxious to prevent "unfair" competition from Ireland and the plantations.

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[41] For the various African Companies, culminating in the Royal Africa Company of England which got its Charter in 1672, see K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 1957.

[42] *H.B. 2*, p. 461; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 231.

[43] *H.B. 3*, pp. 22, 23, 25, McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 231–3.

[44] *Statutes of the Realm*, vii, 393 ff.

The desire of Bristolians to retain their independence of outside control was one of the most important reasons for their opposition to London-dominated companies, but there were financial reasons as well. Some of the companies to which Bristolians objected were quite willing to admit provincial members, provided they paid the usual fees for the privilege of membership. At the beginning of the century, many Bristolians had joined the Spanish Company, and they withdrew from it only because Common Council ordered them to do so. The constitution of the French Company made provision for provincial members in what was intended to be a national organisation. If Bristolians did not join, it was because they did not choose to do so. The Levant Company was also open to them, and some did in fact join it. In the post-Restoration years, both the Levant Company and the Merchant Adventurers of England were willing to admit Bristolians on favourable terms, but Bristol rejected the offer. Nor was there anything in the constitution of the East India Company or of the Royal Africa Company to prevent provincial merchants buying shares when they came on the market. Opposition to all these companies was to a large extent opposition, not to monopolies from which Bristolians were excluded, but to monopolies in which they could participate only if they paid their share of the costs. It is significant that in the sixteen-thirties Bristolians were alone among the west-country merchants in opposing a levy on those engaged in the French trade which the other considered essential if the trade was to be re-established on a satisfactory basis. Again, at the end of the century when the Commons passed a bill opening the African trade, the merchants of Bristol carried their opposition to the House of Lords, not because they objected to opening the trade, but because they strongly objected to paying the tax which Parliament imposed to maintain the Royal African Company's ports.[45] They wanted trade to be free, but they took little account of the argument that certain necessary services could be maintained only if the merchants as a whole were willing to pay for them.

The arguments used by the Bristol merchants in these debates might give the impression that they were enlightened champions of economic freedom, but their policy was in fact only the very natural one of opposing controls which they themselves found irksome. They had no objection to controls which worked to their advantage. They fought long and hard to exclude retailers from a share in the foreign trade of Bristol; they tried to get their charters excepted from the Act of Parliament of 1606 which opened the French, Spanish and Portuguese trade to everyone; they were ready to share in monopolies in the export of butter and calf-skins,[46] and they were enthusiastic supporters of controls such as the prohibition of the growing of tobacco in England,[47] the Acts of Trade which regulated commerce with the English colonies, and the laws which restricted Irish economic development for the benefit of England. If they seemed to be fore-runners of Adam Smith in their opposition to monopolies, it was because they had themselves no monopoly to defend. They would probably not have been so enthusiastic if they had been, for example, shareholders in the East India Company or in the Royal African Company, or if they had had formed part of a monopolistic West India Company. As things were, the policy they followed was simply the one which their interests demanded.

But although their motives were not disinterested, they nevertheless played an important part in a widespread movement in the seventeenth century to make foreign trade open to a wider circle of Englishmen. In the course of the century, the "free traders" gained notable successes. The monopoly of the Eastland Company was drastically curtailed in 1673[48] and the entrance fee to the Russia Company was reduced from £50 to £5 in 1699.[49] Even more significant, Parliament in 1689 took away the exclusive privileges of the Merchant Adventurers of England,[50] and in 1698 it opened the African trade, although those engaged in it were required to pay a tax to maintain the forts.[51] Although a number of companies for foreign trade still survived in 1700, some of them, like the East India

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[45] *MSS. of the House of Lords, 1697–9*, iii, 245; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 233.

[46] *Infra*, p. 66.

[47] See C. M. MacInnes, *The Early English Tobacco Trade*, 1926.

[48] *Statutes of the Realm*, v. 793.

[49] *Statutes of the Realm*, vii, 463. At the same time, membership was thrown open to retailers.

[50] *Statutes of the Realm*, vi, 97.

[51] *Statutes of the Realm*, viii, 393.

Company and the Hudson Bay Company, with complete monopolies, foreign trade was much freer at the end of the seventeenth century than it had been at the beginning. The Society of Merchant Venturers could justifiably feel that its persistent and quite costly efforts had been of considerable importance in shaping national policy and serving the interests of Bristol.

PROTECTION OF THE INTERESTS OF THE MERCHANTS

Opposition to London-dominated companies was the most important single aspect of the Society's work for the merchant community of Bristol, but it must be seen as part of a wider policy of defending the interests of Bristol whenever they were threatened. This involved the Society in a great deal of activity, only part of which can be examined here.[52] Generally speaking, what the Society did benefited the city as a whole, but it must be remembered that it existed primarily to further the interests of its own members and that on occasions the interest of other sections of the community had to take second place.

The background to many of the conflicts in which Bristol was involved with the early Stuarts was the Government's need for money. The extravagance of James I, the attempt to save the Protestant cause in the Thirty Years War, the wars with Spain and France between 1625 and 1630, and the break between king and parliament in 1629, meant that the Government's financial resources were strained to breaking point at a time when the value of money was falling and the taxation system was hopelessly out-of-date. Between 1603 and 1640, the Government strove to deal with the situation by exploiting to the full its traditional rights and by devising new means of raising money. Inevitably, this led to conflict, for the men of the seventeenth century did not like being taxed. On numerous occasions, the merchants of Bristol were ready with plausible explanations of why they could not pay. Their tearful complaints about the deacy of trade and the impoverished condition of the city must not be taken at face-value. Often, they were part of a bargaining process by which a figure more or less acceptable to both sides was eventually agreed. Sometimes, the Government used strong-arm methods, and on occasions the Society had an unpleasant experience of what government agents could do. But Latimer's gloomy picture of grievous oppression suffered by the city and the Society from the beginning of the century to the Civil War needs to be looked at critically. On the whole, the merchants prospered, and much of what a nineteenth-century Liberal like Latimer regarded as grievous oppression was probably regarded by its victims as part of the normal give-and-take of seventeenth-century government.

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[52] For a fuller treatment, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers, passim.*

One of the disputes which took up a great deal of the merchants' time and money up to 1640 concerned the crown's right of purveyance of grocery and wine for the royal household. It was an ancient and undoubted right of the crown under certain conditions to take quantities of goods for the royal household at prices fixed by the officers of the Board of Green Cloth. The right was increasingly resented, and it afforded numerous occasions for dispute until purveyance was finally abolished by the Long Parliament. As far as Bristol was concerned, the matter was primarily one for the Corporation, but the Society was also deeply involved, and there are a large number of references to it in the records.[53]

Another matter which gave the Society a great deal of concern between 1608 and 1640 was the increased duties on wine imposed by James I and Charles I. The legality of the new impositions was continually questioned by others in the Commons. The Society's concern was not so much to raise general principles, but to find reasons why Bristolians should not pay. Once again, its efforts were recorded at length in the *Book of Trade.*[54]

In the 1630s, when the King was ruling without Parliament and was in great need of money, Bristolians found themselves in trouble on a number of occasions. In the war at sea between 1625 and 1630, several merchants and others had fitted out privateers with letters of marque.[55] It is more than likely that not all the prize goods were declared and that the Lord Admiral did not always receive the one-tenth share to which he was entitled. An enquiry into concealed prizes in 1635 was highly embarrassing, and the merchants and shipowners complained in a petition to the King that they were being sued in the Court of Exchequer and in the Court of Wards "contrary to all lawe or president . . . thereby endeavouring to force them to accompt of thinges long since past and out of memory. . . ." They begged the King to put a stop to these vexatious suits.[56]

Not surprisingly, there was a great deal of trouble between the merchants and the officers of the customs, partly over the question of fees and partly over the alleged illegal export of prohibited goods. Few seventeenth-century officials were above reproach, and many were ready to supplement their meagre salaries by dubious methods, but many merchants were anxious to avoid paying duties. In any dispute, both parties were quick to blacken the reputation of their opponents. Thus, in 1634 the merchants complained tearfully that they had been subjected to ungrounded, false accusations, that they had been summoned before Star Chamber, and that sailors had been tempted to make false accusations against their employers. All this was alleged to have cost the merchants over £1,000 in the last five years and to have wounded their reputations.[57] Against this picture of honest merchants harassed by wicked officials must be set the account given by the Searcher of the Customs who alleged that the merchants had illegally exported great quantities of prohibited goods. He complained to the Council that "the nowe Maior and other Cheife Merchants of Bristoll . . . findinge that the peticoner would not Combine with them to passe and suffer their said goods and others prohibited unlawefully to be transported . . . have not onely splenatiquely certified your Lordshipps of a manifest untruth against the peticoner . . . but have alsoe upon the bare reporte of one Christopher Cary, a confederat of theirs, in a very malicious and disgracefull manner . . . bound the peticoner to good behaviour . . . Whereby (as alsoe by some former indirecte practises by sundry of the said merchantes of Bristoll) the peticoner and his Deputyes have byn and still are greately discouradged and hindred. . . ."[58] It is impossible to establish the truth, but it is probable that the Merchants of Bristol were not the innocent lambs they claimed to be.

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[53] *Book of Trade*, pp. 120–2, 133–6, 138, 140, 176–9, 181–3, 195; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 112–16; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 234–5.

[54] *Book of Trade*, pp. 47, 48, 120, 121, 124–30, 134–8, 149–51, 154–7, 176–7, 233–6. For further details about the disputes, see J. Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 114–19; Andre Simon, *The Wine Trade in England*, III, 9 ff.

[55] J. W. D. Powell, *Bristol Privateers and Ships of War*, Bristol, 1930.

[56] P.R.O.: *S.P. 16/302, no. 109*, 8 Dec. 1635; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 238–9.

There were similar charges and counter-charges when a commission under Lord Mohun came to Bristol to inquire into the great sums of money which the magistrates, merchants and others were alleged to have levied unlawfully on goods imported and exported. The Society was involved because one of the matters at issue was the wharfage duties, which the Society had been collecting by informal permission of the Corporation and which it had recently increased in order to recoup itself for its contribution to Ship Money. There was doubt about the legality of the duty, which had not been imposed before 1606, and there is a possibility that someone in Bristol who was no friend to the establishment had tipped off the Government and provided it with a chance of exacting fines from the merchants. The commissioners were very anxious to see the Society's books and get statements from its members, and the Society was determined not to provide information. Its resistance was met with force by the commissioners. The Hall was broken into and a number of papers seized. According to the commissioners, the Society had obstructed them in every possible way. The Warden, Master and Treasurer had refused to hand over the keys of a chest in the Hall which contained the accounts. The commissioners nevertheless had managed to see several books and had left them in the care of the Society's Clerk, Richard Griffith. The Warden, Edmund Arundel, then took the books from Griffith and sent him to London so that he would not be available for questioning. When a warrant was sent to Arundel requiring him to produce the books, he refused to read it and denied on oath that he had the keys of the Hall or the books. When Arundel was further examined, he "sought with dilatory and unfitting and maskt answeres to spend the tyme", and then he refused to sign the record of his examination. When he was asked if he thought the commissioners would have broken open the doors or the chests if they had not found "purposed opposition to the said service", he replied "I will give noe answere therunto; but haveing discovered . . . the secrets of the inquiry . . . and haveing therein kept the Commissioners from two of the clock till seven at night, refused to firme (sign) his former examination, with a purpose as wee conceive to discover the secrets to the rest of the Bristol men. . . ."[59]

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[57] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 121, 122.

[58] P.R.O.: *S.P. 16/337, no. 24*; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 239–40. For a collection of documents relating to disputes with customs officers, see Merchants' Hall records: John Tyndale v. The Merchant Venturers (Court of Exchequer, 1692/3).

Such actions can be represented as a courageous defence of freedom by the Society and its officers against the minions of a tyrannical government, or as a conspiracy on the part of a group of men to resist a government enquiry into a source of revenue of questionable legality. The issue was certainly not as plain as Latimer suggested, and there is doubt about whether Edmund Arundel can be presented as a Bristol version of John Hampden.

Other troubles in which the city and the Society were involved under the early Stuarts included the demand on the ports to provide money for an expedition against the pirates of Algiers in 1621;[60] the levying of Ship Money; distraint of knighthood; restrictions on the making of soap in Bristol and limitations on its exports; patents for cutting down trees in the Forest of Dean, which were alleged to have a bad effect on the Bristol shipbuilding industry; and restrictions on the export of beer.[61] The Society and its members played their part in defending Bristol's interests on a number of occasions in these disputes. Although the alleged grievances of the merchants must be treated with caution, there was justification for some of the complaints.

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[59] P.R.O.: *S.P. 16/379 no. 3*, 18 Jan. 1638. For the merchants' account of the affair, see P.R.O.: *S.P. 16/379 no. 1*; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 240–2.

[60] For further details, including the long-drawn out resistance to the demands of the Government, see Patrick McGrath, "The Merchant Venturers and Bristol Shipping in the Early Seventeenth Century", *Mariner's Mirror*, vol. xxxvi, no. 1, 1950. *Infra*, p. 79.

[61] There is a good deal of information about Bristol's grievances in these years in a local chronicle – *Adams' Chronicle of Bristol* (Bristol, 1910). The chronicler's complaints should not always be taken at face-value.

On the other hand, the Society was quite prepared to cooperate with the Government at the expense of others when it suited its interests. One illustration of this is its participation in a patent for the export of Welsh butter. Export was forbidden by various statutes in the interest of English consumers, but the crown from time to time granted to patentees licence to export, notwithstanding the statutes. In 1619, the Society obtained a share in one of the patents. This was to involve it in a great deal of trouble in the next forty years. The full story can be found elsewhere,[62] but two points seem clear in this involved business: one, that the Society was very ready to defend its special privilege against those who complained that it put up the price of butter; and two, that under cover of the patent, members of the Society exported a great deal more butter than they were entitled to do under the grant. They could hardly complain when this got them into trouble with informers, who denounced them to the Government.

There were similar troubles over the share which the Merchant Venturers acquired in a patent to export calf-skins, notwithstanding the statutes prohibiting export. In 1641, when the patent was being called in question by the Long Parliament on the ground that it put up prices, the merchants referred to one of the agents of the patentee as "a Rapatious Moore . . . the woundes of whose Tallentes [*sic*] in most of us Remaines to this day incured . . .".[63] Nevertheless, they were not anxious for the trade to be thrown open and they wanted the patent to be granted to the city or to the Society.[64]

The Society's role was also less than straightforward with regard to a tax of 40s. a tun on wine which the King imposed in 1637 and the collection of which he farmed out to the London Vintners' Company. When the Long Parliament was investigating the matter in 1641, the Society hastened to explain the way in which it had been victimised by the wicked London vintners. It alleged that in 1638 the vintners had sent agents to Bristol who demanded to see all the stocks of wine in the city and who appointed a collector of the duties in Bristol. The merchants claimed that they tried by all lawful means to oppose the payment of the duties, but they found no relief from the Council and were forced "for their peace of mind and to preserve themselves from Ruine . . . to accept such condicons as the Company of Vintners of London proposed". These were that the

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[62] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 119–25 and other references given there.

[63] *Book of Trade*, p. 250, 9 Dec. 1641.

[64] For further details about the calf-skin patent, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 125–8, and other references given there.

Society should collect the duty in and around Bristol, receiving £500 for "labour, badd wines, losses and the like...." Unfortunately, they found all men "so backward in paiement" that they had collected only £1,096 13s. 4d., of which they had so far paid in £800. The merchants said that they sold their wines to vintners of whom there were only 12 in Bristol. Six of these had gone bankrupt after the imposition of the tax. In view of their losses, the Bristol merchants had asked the London Vintners to release them, but they refused to do so and prosecuted them in the Court of the Exchequer as well as arresting a Bristol man in London and bringing him before the Council.[65]

This tale of injured innocence was not apparently accepted by the House of Commons, and the two Bristol M.P.s, Humphrey Hooke and Richard Longe, who were members of the Society and who belonged to the group of twelve which had organised the collection of the wine duties, were expelled from the House as beneficiaries in the Wine Project.[66]

In view of the harrowing picture which Latimer and others have painted of the sufferings of Bristolians in general and of the merchants in particular, it is important to remember that neither the two M.P.s elected in 1640 nor the two who replaced the members expelled in 1642 showed any enthusiasm for the parliamentary cause. They were in fact royalists. If Bristolians bitterly resented the Stuart "tyranny", it is difficult to understand why the city, which had a remarkably large electorate, did not show its resentment in the elections.

One benefit which the Society got from the Civil War was its Charter of 1643. At a time when London was opposing the King, Charles I was very willing to give privileges to Bristol, and the Society was able to press its claims against the London-dominated companies. In the Charter, the King noted that "our good and lovinge Subjects the Merchants of the said Citty of Bristoll have expressed their loyalty and fidelity unto us in these late times of difficulty when our Citty of London and the Cittizens and Merchants thereof who have held and enjoyed many more priviledges and Immunityes for the advancing of a free and ample trade into all Forraine parts have forgotten their duty . . .'.[67] The reward of virtue was a grant to the Society of the right to trade to the areas hitherto restricted to the Eastland Company, the Levant Company and the Merchant Adventurers of England, but as Bristol fell to

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[65] For the trouble with the London Vintners, see *Book of Trade*, pp. 242, 245, 249, 252–4; *H.B. 1*, pp. 2, 29, 41; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 221–5; Andre Simon, *The Wine Trade in England*, iii, 42–58.

[66] *Journals of the House of Commons*, ii, 415, 567 (12 May 1642).

[67] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 106.

Fairfax and Cromwell in the next year, the Society was unable to make use of the privileges.

There is not a great deal of evidence concerning the role of the Society in protecting the interests of merchants during the Interregnum. Some of its members were in trouble for delinquency and had to compound, and the Society may have lost some of its prestige and self-confidence in these difficult years. It was probably not very active. Nevertheless in 1648, it thanked the Mayor, aldermen and Sheriff for sending a petition to London asking for ships of war to protect merchantmen against Irish and other pirates, and it agreed to send another petition in the name of the Hall if need required.[68] Four years later, it was busy trying to secure ships of war to protect the port and the channel,[69] and in 1658 it set up a committee to procure a convoy from the Admiralty.[70] In 1654, we find it agreeing to join with west-country merchants in petitioning against the Dutch trading with Barbados, the Caribbean islands and Virginia.[71]

In the trade expansion in the post-Restoration period, the Society once more took the lead as a champion of mercantile interests. In 1660, it instructed the M.P.s to try to secure for it a revival of the patents concerning the export of butter and calfskins. If that could not be achieved, they were to see that these goods were not highly rated for customs duties. The revival of purveyance was to be resisted, the merchants of London were to be supported in their attempts to get the growing of English tobacco suppressed, and the Navigation Act was to be amended.[72] In 1669, the Society, whose members imported olive oil from Spain and Portugal, tried to insist that soap should not be made from tallow, since, it alleged, this ruined English cloth and got it a bad reputation, as well as leading to the reduction of olive oil imported into Bristol from 2,000 tons to 500 tons.[73] In 1672 when there was trouble with the customs officers, the Society ordered that if any member felt he had a grievance, he should ask the Master to call the Hall right away. If he made out a case, the Hall would defend him at its own cost.[74] About the same time, the English consul at Venice suggested that the Government might raise the money to give him a salary commensurate with that of other consuls by imposing a new duty on ships and a tax on merchandise. The proposal had some support, but was opposed by the Levant Company and by the Venetian government whose agent in England stirred up resistance among the merchants. At the request of "some eminent merchants of London", the Society prepared a petition and sent it to a London merchant to present to the King.[75] The instruction to a committee of grievances in 1674 were that "they are to endeavour the redresse of our grievances as to the consulage in Marseilles, the small allowance on corrupt wines, the overgauging of Brandy and strong waters, the abuses by the prisage masters and the searcher and all other our grievances whatsoever."[76]

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[68] *H.B. 1*, pp. 132, 133, 11 Dec. 1648.

[69] *H.B. 1*, pp. 206, 3 Feb. 1652.

[70] *H.B. 1*, pp. 287, 15 Oct. 1658.

[71] *H.B. 1*, pp. 23, 7 Dec. 1654.

[72] *H.B. 1*, pp. 303–4, 14 July 1660; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 243–6.

[73] *Book of Charters 2*, pp. 66, 67, 68, 70–84; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 246–7.

[74] *H.B. 2*, p. 34, 11 Nov. 1672. For complaints against the customs officers about this time, see *Book of Charters 2*, 100–1, 106.

Other problems arose in connection with the duties charged on plantation tobacco landed in Ireland, the tare on sugar and butter, the making of casks from green wood, high fees charged by the Searcher of the Customs, proposed impositions on tobacco and sugar, the duty on spirits made from molasses, and the failure to enforce the Acts of Trade forbidding the shipping of colonial produce direct to Scotland and Ireland.[77] These and other grievances often involved the setting up of a committee, sending petitions to London, alerting the M.P.s, paying agents to press the case, and persuading influential people to help. The kind of thing involved may be illustrated from the instructions given to John Cary in 1695: ". . . Our desire is that you will please to sett forwards on your journey with all the speed you cann and on your arrivall at London to address your selfe to our members in Parliament. And to lay before them the advantage which will arise not only to this city but to the whole Kingdome in generall by passing the plantacion Act which wee desire you to use your utmost endeavours to get don this sessions. Wee alsoe desire you to make application to the Admiralty for a good convoy to secure our Virginia shipps home into this Channell, wherein wee doubt not our said Members will give all the assistance they can, with whome wee desire you to consult about all thinges that concerne the interest of this City. Wee now order the Treasurer to furnish you with fifty pounds which wee hope you will manage with frugality. And as wee find you shall have further occasions shall take due care to supply you. As for other matters you may expect to heare from time to time as occasion offers. Interim wishing you a good Journey and desireing to heare frequently from you. . . ."[78]

In much of what it did to protect the merchants and to get redress of their grievances, the Society was very largely concerned with the interests of its own members, but it also served the interests of other merchants and of the community as a whole. It is difficult to see that the case for Bristol could have been put so effectively by any other means.

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[75] *H.B. 2*, p. 40, 6 Dec. 1672; *Book of Charters 2*, pp. 112, 113; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 248–9. There are also a considerable number of references in the *State Papers Venetian*. The consul persevered until 1675 when the Government finally decided against him.

[76] *H.B. 2*, p. 78, 10 Nov. 1674; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 249–50.

[77] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 250–60.

[78] *H B. 3*, p. 64, 21 Jan. 1696; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 259–60.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PORT

One of the most valuable services which the Society gave to Bristol in the seventeenth century was the development of the port. The Merchant Venturers gradually took over from the Corporation most of the duties of a port authority, and, particularly after 1660, they brought to the task the energy and enterprise which helped Bristol to participate in full measure in the Commercial Revolution.[79]

Although the ultimate responsibility for maintaining the port, conserving the river, licensing the pilots and regulating shipping lay in the hands of the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council, the Corporation was very ready to delegate its duties to those most immediately concerned. When it first began to do so is not certain. In 1601, it granted to twenty-four merchants the right to collect the port dues known as anchorage, cannage and plankage for a period of 80 years at a rent of £3 6s. 8d. a year. The lessees undertook to provide sufficient planks for the discharge of merchandise and to see that the slip at Hungroad was kept clear.[80] This lease was probably a renewal of an earlier one, for in 1577 "the proctors of St. Clements Chapel" held the same duties at the same rent.[81] The income from these duties was not large in the early seventeenth century. In 1617–18, for example, they amounted to only £25 4s. 6d. out of which the Society had to provide an adequate supply of planks and pay £2 a year to the keeper of the slip at Hungroad.[82]

Another early link between the Society and the port was found in the duties of tonnage on each ton of goods and poundage on seamen's wages, which were used for the upkeep of an almshouse for poor mariners, for the wages of a schoolmaster for poor mariners' children and for the salary of a curate at Hungroad. The first definite mention of these duties is in 1595, but they were then referred to as being an established custom.[83] Again, the financial value in the early seventeenth century was small. In 1617–18, for example, tonnage brought in £21 10s. 6d. and poundage £3 18s. 9d.[84]

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[79] For a fuller examination of this aspect of its work, see Patrick McGrath, "The Society of Merchant Venturers and the Port of Bristol in the 17th Century", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxii, 1953; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 135–75.

[80] Bristol Record Office: *C.T.D.* 00352 (2) and (5).

[81] Bristol Record Office: *Mayor's Audits*, 04026(10), pp. 206, 272.

[82] The Collector's Account for 1617–18 is in the *Book of Trade*. It is printed in McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 88–91. Hungroad was the deep water anchorage in the Avon a little below Bristol.

[83] *Cal. S.P.D. 1595–1597*, pp. 105–5, 5 Oct. 1595. The duties probably date back to the establishment of a Gild of Mariners in 1445–6 when sailors were required to

The connections between the Society and the port became very much stronger in the first decade of the century when the Corporation created a new duty known as wharfage. It was first imposed in 1606 on the goods of non-freemen coming to Bristol but in 1607 it was extended to include the goods of freemen as well.[85] Wharfage money was to be used to repair the Back and Quay which were alleged to be in great decay in spite of £1,500 recently spent on them.[86] Latimer was probably right when he suggested that the real purpose of the new duty was to put on a sound financial basis the Society of Merchant Venturers which the Corporation had reorganised at the end of 1605.[87] It is significant that William Fleet, the Collector of Wharfage appointed by the Corporation on 8 July 1606, was also Collector for the merchants. In the patent appointing him, the Society stated that one of the purposes of the duty was to repay money lent by the Corporation to the Bristol Adventurers.[88] Some wharfage money was paid into the Chamber of Bristol between 1606 and 1611,[89] but after 1611 there were no further payments. The Society's account for 1610–11 shows it collecting the money for its own use.[90] Thus, by an informal arrangement the Society acquired what was to be its main source of income for the rest of the century.

There was considerable doubt about the legality of the new imposition, and in 1607 the Common Council requested the Bristol M.P.s to get counsel's opinion and to apply for royal letters patent authorising the duty.[91] Latimer thought that the royal consent was probably obtained, but there is no evidence of this, although in 1625 the Privy Council implicitly recognised the legality of wharfage when it gave the Hall support against a shipowner who refused to pay the increased rate.[92] As we have seen, the royal commissioners who came to Bristol and seized some of the Society's account books and other papers in 1637 were clearly concerned with the legality of

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contribute from their wages for the support of a priest and 12 poor mariners. *Little Red Book of Bristol*, edit. F. B. Bickley, Bristol, 1900, II, 186–92.

[84] *The Collector's Account 1617–18* in the *Book of Trade*, printed in McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 88–91.

[85] Bristol Record Office: *C.C.P. 1598–1608*, pp. 116, 132.

[86] *Book of Trade*, p. 43.

[87] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 65.

[88] *Book of Trade*, p. 45.

[89] Bristol Record Office: *Mayor's Audits*, 04026(15), pp. 72, 136, and 04026(16), pp. 12, 76. These show payments of £11 3s. 2d. in 1606; £50 in 1607, £50 in 1610, and £40 in 1611.

[90] See McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 88.

[91] Bristol Records Office: *C.C.P. 1598–1608*, p. 135.

[92] *Book of Trade*, p. 169; *Acts of the Privy Council 1623–1625*, p. 485.

wharfage,[93] but the enquiry seems to have petered out, and the Society's right to collect the duty was not again challenged until the eighteenth century.[94]

Until 1661, the Society's position was doubly insecure, for it had no formal lease and it retained the money only by tacit consent of the Corporation. An attempt to get a definite grant in 1623–4 met with no success.[95] Nevertheless, it continued to collect the money, and on occasions it made temporary increases in the rates without apparently bothering to obtain official sanction from the Corporation.[96]

Although the wharfage dues were the main source of income for the Society, they did not amount to very much before 1660. In 1610–11, for example, they brought in only £6 11s. 1d. and in 1619–20, £107 7s. 10d.[97] From the Wharfage Books, which begin in 1654, it appears that the average yearly income from 1654 to 1660 was just over £200.

In the period before the Restoration, the Society did not undertake any major work in the port, and a proposal that it should construct a dry dock came to nothing.[98] Its limited resources made large-sacle capital expenditure impossible, and although there was a growth in the volume of foreign trade, it was not on such a scale as to make extension of the quays a high priority. Nevertheless, the Society performed a number of useful functions in connection with the port. From time to time, it organised surveys of the river with a view to removing obstructions to shipping. Thus, in 1610–11, the *Book of Charters* recorded that "This yeere, the Channel was surveyed by Martyn Prin and other marriners, at the appointment and Direction of the Maister and Wardens. . . ."[99] It set up mooring posts for ships,[100] it exercised control over the graving dock in the Marsh, appointed the Keeper and laid down a scale of charges.[101] It paid men to look after the slip at Hungroad,[102] and it recommended suitable persons to be appointed as pilots.[103]

Even before 1660, the need to develop the port was becoming clear. In 1654, when the Corporation decided that a new quay should be built, the Society agreed to contribute and set up a committee to report on what charges should be levied on imports and exports to help with the cost.[104] However, nothing was done until after the Restoration when at long last the Society got from the Corporation a lease of the wharfage duties which it had hitherto collected by an informal arrangement. In an agreement dated 28 September 1661, the Corporation renewed the lease of anchorage, cannage and plankage for 80 years at the former rent of £3 6s. 8d. and also added the wharfage duties to the agreement without any increase in rent. In return, the Society agreed to make a new quay from the Lower Slip to Aldworth's Dock and to make a road for coach and horses from Rownham Passage to the Hotwell. The Corporation undertook to contribute £100 towards this work.[105] In 1681, the Corporation also leased to the Society the Great Dock and a smaller dock[106]. In 1690 it gave the Society a new wharfage lease for 80 years in return for a payment of £200 and a yearly rent of £6 6s. 8d. The agreement stated that the Society had already been at considerable expense and had furthermore undertaken to make another new quay 462 feet long from Aldworth's Dock to Hobb's Yard in the Marsh. Permission was also given to remove a market house and other buildings near Aldworth's Dock in order to widen the quay.[107]

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[93] *Supra*, pp. 64–5.

[94] *Infra*, pp. 163–4.

[95] *Book of Charters 1*, p. 95.

[96] *Book of Trade*, p. 80; *Book of Charters 1*, p. 97; *H.B. 1*, p. 73.

[97] *Book of Trade*, General Account 1610–11 and the Collector's Account, 1617–1618, printed in McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 84–91.

[98] Bristol Record Office: *C.C.P. 1608–1627*, p. 140; Latimer, *Seventeenth Century Annals*, p. 88.

[99] *Book of Charters 1*, p. 43. See also other examples, *ibid.*, pp. 45, 51.

[100] See, for example, *Treasurer's Book I*, 6, 7; *H.B. 1*, pp. 252, 271.

[101] *Book of Trade*, pp. 138–9; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 138, 139.

[102] This was an obligation under the anchorage lease. There are numerous references to payments in the *Book of Trade* and the *Treasurer's Book.*

[103] *Infra*, p. 75.

To meet its new commitments, the Society doubled the wharfage duties in the years 1661–4.[108] In 1667, it decided, apparently on its own authority, to charge wharfage on the outward-bound goods of non-members. Moreover, it also decreed that all barques coming from south of Barnstaple and from north of Tenby should be liable for the duty.[109] This was an innovation, for hitherto coastal shipping had been completely exempt. The new duty of *wharfage outwards* was not in fact enforced until 25 March 1668,[110] after which date it was regularly paid by those who were not members of the Society. The attempt to impose a duty on coastal shipping was not, however, successful at this time. There were certain legal difficulties and some differences of opinion among the lawyers whose advice was asked.[111] Additional revenue was also raised by increasing the duty of anchorage in 1670.[112]

[104] Bristol Record Office: *Book of Acts and Ordinances*, 04273(2), fo. 53 v, 18 Aug. 1654; *H.B. 1*, pp. 152, 252; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 140–1.

[105] Bristol Record Office: *C.T.D.* 00352(6). There is another copy in the records of the Society.

[106] Bristol Record Office: *Bargain Books 1672–81*, 04335(6), fo. 135; *Book of Charters 2*, 142.

[107] Bristol Record Office: *C.T.D.* 00352(4). Another copy is in the records of the Society.

[108] *H.B. 1*, pp. 328, 359.

[109] *H.B. 1*, p. 403.

[110] *H.B. 1*, p. 417.

[111] *H.B. 2*, pp. 290–4, 298, 300; *H.B. 3*, p. 146.

[112] *H.B. 1*, p. 456.

By increasing and extending the port dues at a period when the trade of the port was growing, the Society considerably improved its revenue. Between 1660 and 1694, wharfage brought in a total of over £13,500, an average of just over £400 a year, and anchorage between 1679 and 1694 was worth nearly £60 a year.[113] There might be some question about the legality of the means, but the Society had certainly put itself in a much better position to improve the facilities of the port.

In accordance with its agreement, the Society built a new quay on the Frome. It spent over £700 between 1661 and 1663 on this work and on building a road from Rownham to the Hotwell.[114] Further expenses were incurred later, for the Society's records for 1677–8 state laconically "This yeere the new Key fell into the River, and was ordered to be replaced at the charge of the Hall."[115] The Treasurer was instructed to borrow up to £200 for repairs, and in 1679–80 there is a note "This yeere the Key was rebuilt."[116]

The new quay of the sixteen-sixties was not sufficient for the growing needs of the port, and from 1680 the Society was considering further expansion.[117] In a petition to the Treasury in 1690, it stated that there was great need to enlarge the quay. This would lead to a quicker turn-round of ships and make unnecessary the practice of ships being loaded over other ships. It would cut down the expenses of the customs officers, since they would no longer have to wait on vessels seven or eight days before unloading could begin.[118] The petition was approved, and the Society, which had in March 1690 made a new agreement with the Corporation, was able to go ahead with its plans.[119] The new quay was expensive, and since much of the Society's capital was now tied up in the purchase of the manor of Clifton, it had to be financed to a considerable extent by loans. £400 was borrowed in June 1690 and another £600 in October 1692.[120] Between 1690 and 1693, approximately £2,000 was spent on the actual work, in addition to other expenses relating to the scheme.[121]

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[113] See Patrick McGrath, "The Society of Merchant Venturers and the Port of Bristol in the 17th Century", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxii, 1953.

[114] *Treasurer's Book 2*, fo. 17. The total may have been greater as it is not always clear from the accounts whether certain payments for labour and materials should be credited to the account for the quay.

[115] *Book of Charters 1*, p. 205.

[116] *Book of Charters 2*, pp. 127, 131, 209.

[117] Patrick McGrath, "The Society of Merchant Venturers and the Port of Bristol in the 17th Century", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxii, 1953, p. 115.

[118] P.R.O.: *Treasury Books T 1/8 no. 17*; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 149–151.

[119] Bristol Record Office: *C.T.D. 00352(4)*. There is another copy in the Merchants' Hall.

[120] *H.B. 2*, pp. 446, 502.

[121] Estimate based on an examination of the figures in the *Treasurer's Book* and the *Beadle's Book*.

Another £500 was required for a further extension of the quay in 1700.[122]

The Society also had the responsibility for maintaining and improving the existing facilities. There were numerous payments for repairing and cleaning the Back and the Quay. On occasions, the outlay was substantial. Thus, £125 was spent on pointing and pitching the Quay in 1674–5,[123] and £54 19s. 8d. was needed for work on the Back in 1698–9.[124] The slips on the river also required constant attention. Work on the Tower Slip cost over £30 in 1667, and another £20 was spent the next year.[125]

Another service which the Society undertook was the provision of cranes to supplement the Corporation's Great Crane. The order for one such crane was given in October 1664,[126] and additional orders were given when the quays were extended in the 1690s.[127] In 1692 it was decided that an artist should be employed to inspect the cranes in London with a view to making similar ones in Bristol.[128] In 1696, the cranes were let out at a rent of £44 a year.[129] The rates which might be charged were fixed by the Corporation on the recommendation of the Society.[130]

The appointment of pilots was, in the last resort, the responsibility of the Corporation, but in practice it delegated its powers to the Society. The earliest reference to the Corporation appointing a pilot on the Society's recommendation seems to be in 1623, but there is nothing in the records to suggest that there was anything abnormal about this procedure, which had no doubt begun earlier.[131] The Society obtained from competent judges a certificate that the applicant was suitable, and then forwarded his name to the Corporation. From time to time, it recommended the suspension or dismissal of incompetent pilots. It also sent to the Corporation recommendations concerning the regulation of pilots and the scale of fees they might receive.[132]

In addition, there was the routine business of removing obstructions in the river, providing buoys to mark dangerous places, drawing up regulations for the safety of shipping in the river, and setting up and maintaining mooring posts and mooring chains.[133]

As business increased, it was necessary to improve the administration of the port. In 1670, the Society requested the Corporation to appoint a Havenmaster and agreed to pay him £20 a year. The elaborate regulations concerning his duties were no doubt primarily the work of the Society. The first appointment was a bad one, and in 1676 the Society decided that the office was "needless and impertient", but in 1679 a new appointment was made at a salary of £30 a year paid by the Society. A committee of the Hall gave the Havenmaster instructions from time to time, and in 1680 an elaborate code of regulations was drawn up for ships using the port.[134]

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[122] *Beadle's Book 1686–1709.*

[123] *Treasurer's Book 2*, p. 32.

[124] *Beadle's Book 1686–1709.*

[125] *Treasurer's Book 2*, pp. 23, 24.

[126] *H.B. 1*, p. 357.

[127] *H.B. 2*, p. 256.

[128] *H.B. 2*, p. 498.

[129] *H.B. 3*, p. 72.

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[131] Bristol Record Office: *C.C.P. 1608–1627*, fo. 111 (20 March 1622/3).

[132] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 155–64.

[133] See McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 135–64, and *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxii, 1953, for further references.

In 1671, the Society decided to appoint a Warner who was to give advice concerning the arrival of shipping. He did not receive a salary, but he was authorised by the Society to collect fees from those to whom he gave information. He was dismissed ten years later because he was negligent, demanded excessive fees, and was "a person of Profligate life and conversation". The Havenmaster took over his duties and presumably collected his fees.[135]

The merchants were naturally concerned with the porters who worked on the quays and who carried goods about the city, since their wages were part of the merchants' overheads, and a well-regulated labour force was necessary for the efficiency of the port. When the porters of Bristol wished to be formed into a Company in 1671, they petitioned the Society as well as the Corporation, and the Society no doubt had a hand in drawing up the elaborate ordinances and fixing the fees which they might charge.[136] In 1699, when there was a dispute about their wages, the Common Council referred it to the Master of the Society, and in due course the Society submitted a new wage schedule which was approved by the Council.[137]

The Graving Dock in the Marsh where ships were repaired was also under the Society's control. In 1621, for example, it gave authority to John Hughes, mariner, "being nowe growne into yeares, and not able to take paines for his liveing into forraigne partes", to keep the graving place and to take the fees authorised in the schedule.[138] There are not many references to the Society's control in the later records, but it evidently remained in charge, for in 1696 it authorised William Hannan to officiate there during the sickness of William Steel.[139]

At the end of the century, the Society crowned its considerable achievements by asking the Corporation to procure an Act of Parliament "for the repairing and preserving the same river by such methods as shalbe thought fitt".[140] Its initiative resulted in 1700 in

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[134] See note 133.

[135] *H.B. 2*, pp. 12, 176.

[136] Bristol Record Office: *C.T.D. 04369 (1)*, pp. 21–6.

[137] Bristol Record Office: *C.C.P. 1687–1702*, fos. 181, 181(v).

[138] *Book of Trade*, p. 81; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 138–9.

[139] *H.B. 3*, p. 85.

[140] *H.B. 3*, p. 159, 10 Nov. 1699.

"An Act for the better Preserving the Navigation of the Rivers Avon and Froome, and for Cleansing Paving and Inlighting the streets of the City of Bristol".[141] The Act gave the Corporation a blank cheque, the details of which were naturally filled in by the experts, the Merchant Venturers of Bristol. The Society drew up lengthy regulations which were submitted for approval to the Justices of the Peace in Quarter Sessions.[142] The Justices who gave their approval were, with two exceptions, members of the Society.

The first set of orders concerned the officers of the port whose numbers were increased and whose duties were defined. The Haven-master's salary was fixed at £50, an increase of £20 over that previously paid. A new office of Ballast Master was created at £20 a year. He was to see that everyone getting stones for ballast from rocks and quarries made sufficient stanks to stop stones or rubbish rolling into the river. Ballast was to be unloaded on a Ballast Wharf, and there were a number of regulations about loading and unloading. Another new officer, the Quay Warden, with a salary of £20 a year, was to control the mooring of ships and the times allowed for loading. He was also responsible for enforcing a number of fire regulations. The Society recommended that a crane, lighter and boat should be employed to take up ledges, rocks and stones in the river, at an estimated cost of £40 per annum.[143]

The cost of these and other services came to an estimated £127 a year, and this was to be raised by a number of changes in the rates for anchorage and moorage and by a charge on coastal shipping. The management and collection of the duties was to be in the hands of the Merchant Venturers.

The general verdict on the Society's management of the port in the seventeenth century must be a favourable one. The Corporation had in effect handed over the management to the Merchant Venturers and had assisted them financially by allowing them to collect duties of somewhat doubtful legality, but the Society had in this period given a good deal more than value for money.

THE PROTECTION OF SHIPPING

Apart from the normal hazards of the sea, merchant ships in the seventeenth century had to face risks from pirates and Turkish corsairs as well as dangers from enemy action in the numerous conflicts in which England was engaged. Since a number of Merchant

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[141] 11 and 12 William III c. 23.

[142] Bristol Record Office: *Orders of Quarter Sessions, 05056,* fos. 5–10, 26 Aug. and 28 Sept. 1700.

[143] For further details about these regulations, see *Trans. B.G.A.S.* lxxii, 1953, pp. 125–7.

Venturers were shipowners as well as merchants, it is not surprising to find the Society spending a great deal of energy on trying to secure adequate protection for merchant shipping.[144]

The nature and extent of the danger varied from time to time. In the first part of the century, pirates and Turkish corsairs were a considerable threat. In the Civil War, Bristol ships suffered from both royal and parliamentary activity, and in the wars with the Dutch and the French in the second half of the century, there was an urgent need for convoys.

In the years after the peace with Spain in 1604 there were a number of Englishmen operating in close alliance with some of the Muslim states of North Africa and taking advantage part of the time of the comparative safety afforded by bases in Ireland. They sometimes worked in large packs. That the losses of Bristol ships were relatively light was due partly to the efforts of the navy and partly to self-help by the merchants. Thus, in 1613 the Society fitted out the *Concord* and the *True Love* to suppress pirates in the Severn estuary,[145] and in 1614 it sent out the *Amity*, the *James*, the *Matthew* and the *White Angel* at a cost of £320 1s. 11d.[146] Some of the money was advanced by individual Merchant Venturers who were subsequently repaid with interest.[147] The merchants claimed in 1620 that some of their number had in the last five years spent at least £500 out of their own pockets in suppressing English and Irish pirates.[148]

It was also necessary to make the Government aware of the needs of Bristol and to maintain good relations with the officers of the Royal Navy who were sent to protect commerce. In 1613, the *Dreadnought* was ordered to the Severn estuary to help the merchants suppress pirates, and in subsequent years the *Phoenix* under Sir Thomas Button did very useful work and won praise from the Society. In 1623, the Society asked that the complement of Button's crew might be increased "that soe we may contynue quiett and free from the spoyles and depredacion of Pirates, as by means of the Phenix her service wee have done theis five yeeres last past . . .".[149]

The corsairs based in North Africa and Barbary nevertheless remained a threat to all European shipping. In a list of 44 Bristol ships lost between 1610 and 1620, no less than 23 were alleged to have been taken by them.[150] The virtually independent states of

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[144] Patrick McGrath, "The Merchant Venturers and Bristol Shipping in the early Seventeenth Century", *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 36, no. 1, Jan. 1950; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 176–98.

[145] *Book of Charters 1*, p. 47.

[146] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[147] *Book of Trade*, General Account 1613–14.

[148] Patrick McGrath, "The Merchant Venturers and Bristol Shipping in the early seventeenth century," *Mariner's Mirror*, xxxvi, no. 1, 1950, p. 70.

[149] *Book of Trade*, p. 139. See also p. 66.

[150] See Appendix to my article in *The Mariner's Mirror*, voi. xxxvi, no. 1, 1950.

Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli and Sallee, often using European captains, sailors and technicians, were a menace to any port which dealt with the Iberian peninsula or with the Mediterranean. They also operated in the Atlantic, and the threat was brought home vividly to Bristolians when they surprised and captured Lundy Island in 1625.

James I endeavoured to take action. An expedition was planned for 1617, but was dropped for the time and not revived until 1619 when the chief ports and a number of the Companies for foreign trade were required to contribute. Bristol's assessment was £2,500, to be paid in two instalments. The Bristol merchants showed a notable lack of enthusiasm, and the Mayor had to report to the Council that the total amount which the merchants and shipowners would contribute was £600. He said he had managed to get others to increase the amount to £1,000, but that this was all Bristol could afford. The Merchant Venturers showed much ingenuity in producing arguments to prove that they could not pay any more. They claimed that Bristol's £1,000 was as good in proportion to their numbers and trade as London's £40,000 and suggested that "twoe or three marchants of London are able to buy all the Inhabitants of Bristoll out of all their means in the world, saving their persons . . ."

On this occasion the merchants of Bristol were singularly uncoöperative. In the end, they provided only £1,000 out of the £2,500 required, and they paid it as late in the day as they dared. In April 1621, half of the contribution was still unpaid. It had been left in London in the hands of Ellis Crispe since the previous June, and the merchants were considering whether they could let it out on short loan at 6 per cent. It was not until John Guy pointed out that no one else was behind-hand a penny that they finally handed the money over to the Exchequer. The money was recovered by temporarily doubling the wharfage duties, and when John Brooke, a cooper and shipowner, refused to pay the increased rates, he was taught a sharp lesson as "a terror to others hereafter, yf there shalbee any of this turbulent humour". It was evidently one thing for the Society to be uncooperative with the Government but quite another for a Bristolian to make difficulties for the Society.[151]

Similar lack of enthusiasm was shown in 1633 when Exeter called a meeting of the western ports which decided to send representatives to London to ask the King to take speedy action against the Turkish pirates. Bristol was not represented at the meeting. Later, when the Society was asked to send one or two representatives to London to act with those from Exeter, Plymouth, Barnstaple, Dartmouth,

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[151] For fuller details of this affair and some of the documents in the case, see *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol. xxxvi, no. 1, 1950; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 179–87.

Weymouth, Melcombe Regis, Totnes, Poole and Lyme, it replied that it had elected a representative, but he found he could not attend, and there was no time to get another able man to take his place.[152]

On the other hand, the Society does not seem to have made any difficulties about the payment of Ship Money which levied between 1634 and 1639, a matter which raised constitutional and legal issues of great significance. There was a good deal of argument about how much Bristol should pay and the familiar complaints were raised about the decay of trade, but the bargaining was carried on by the Corporation, not by the Society, and the matter does not appear in the Society's records.[153]

The disturbance of the Civil War years must have raised many problems for merchants and shipowners, but as far as the Society's records are concerned there is not a great deal of information. There is some indication of the disturbed state of affairs in a letter which the Society sent to one of the M.P.s for Bristol in September 1648. The Master and wardens thanked him for procuring the loan of a frigate which they had intended to put forth. Unfortunately, several Bristol vessels had recently been taken by the Irish pirates "which losse (most reflecting on the forwardest of those intended Adventurers) disenableth them from prosecuting their purposes . . .". In any case, they had received news that in addition to the many ships of war which it already had at sea, Wexford was preparing to send out twenty ships "By which you may conceive, that one single Frigott will little avayle us. . . ." They enclosed a petition to the Committee for the Navy. They added that there were four parliamentary frigates in the port "some of which have layne here nere these two moneths and may yet longer (if money bee not dispatched downe to pay their much discontented Marriners)", and remarked with emotion "Sorry wee are, Sir, to see them lie like standing pooles here without motion to corrupt and be corrupted, whilest the enemy dare take our shipps almost out of the very Road". The M.P. was reminded that the safeguarding of the port was not only of advantage to merchants but concerned every tradesman as well as the people in the adjoining counties. The merchants deemed it hard "to pay soe much Custome, and obteyne no proteccion . . .".[154]

Petitions for convoys in time of war continued to be an important part of the Society's work throughout the century. In the various conflicts with the Dutch and with the French after the Restoration, concern was all the greater because the expansion of trade with the West Indies and with the American colonies involved much longer

[152] *Book of Trade*, pp. 213, 216; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 189–90.

[153] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 133–5.

[154] *Book of Trade*, pp. 255, 256; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 191–2.

voyages and much more valuable cargoes than ever before.[155] It was worth taking a lot of trouble to secure adequate protection for "Twentie and fower good Shipps richly laden" which went from Bristol to Virginia in 1665 and which "the Enemy, as your Peticioners heare (are) making great preparacions to surprize . . . in their retorne homewardes . . ."[156], and a strong convoy was urgently needed in 1692 for "between 30 and 40 saile of shipps of considerable value and burthen outward bound for Virginia, Barbados, the Leeward Islands and Jamaica" to keep them safe against "the French Privateers that att present infest this channell and coast of Ireland". Not surprisingly, the merchants found good reasons why the convoy should assemble at Bristol rather than at Milford Haven, Plymouth or Kinsale.[157]

CHARITABLE AND EDUCATIONAL WORK

Although the Society of Merchant Venturers in this period was primarily a professional organisation concerned with furthering the mercantile interests of its members, it was in a modest way involved in charitable and educational work and made some contribution to the remarkable philanthropic achievements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[158]

When the Society acquired in the mid-sixteenth century the property of the dissolved Gild of Mariners, it used the chapel of St. Clement[159] as its Hall, but it also took over responsibility for the Mariners' Almshouse and the 12 poor mariners formerly maintained by the Gild. It thus took possession of a ready-made almshouse which now became known as the Merchants' Almshouse. The income for the maintenance of the almsfolk had originally come from a levy on goods and by deductions from seamen's wages. This was still being collected in 1595,[160] but it does not seem to have continued during the seventeenth century, and the Society maintained the almshouse primarily from its own resources.

The number of people in the Merchants' Almshouse fluctuated. In 1621, there were eight poor seamen, but in 1650 there were nineteen inmates, six of whom were women.[161] Some of the almspeople received weekly allowances from the Society,[162] and one or two individual merchants left gifts in their wills. Thus, Richard Long bequeathed £10 a year "to be imployed at thend of every Three halfe years in Tenn Coates, Ten Caps, ten paire of stockinges and ten paire of shooes" for the poor men in the almshouse, and Hugh Browne left £5 4s. a year for the relief of the poor almsmen. In 1650, the Society itself ordered that two more men should receive coats, caps, stockings, and shoes in addition to those benefiting from Richard Long's gift.[163] At the end of the century, Edward Colston undertook to maintain six more almspeople if the Society would provide room for them, and a similar arrangement was made by the executors of Richard Jones.[164] The Society set up a committee to see to the new building, and it was completed in 1696.[165] Three years later, a subscription was raised to rebuild the older part of the almshouse, and the parts were joined together to make three sides of a quadrangle.[166]

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[155] For example of such petitions, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 193–4, 195, 196–8.

[156] P.R.O.: *S.P. 29/133 no. 66.*

[157] *H.B. 2*, p. 506, 17 Oct. 1692.

[158] For a detailed study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philanthropy, see W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480–1660*, 1959, and *The Forming of the charitable institutions of the West of England*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1960.

[159] The Gild had maintained a priest, but he, of course, ceased to function when the Gild was dissolved. For the Merchants' Almshouse, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 96 ff.

[160] *Supra*, p. 18.

As was customary at the time, the Society showed concern for the religious and moral behaviour of its almsfolk, and the regulations drawn up in 1650 throw light on its attitude. Unless hindered by sickness or urgent necessity, the men and women were to pray privately every morning and evening and were to frequent their parish church or some other church on Sundays "where they may heare Sermons and be Instructed in the Knowledge of God". They were also to hear Lecture Sermons on weekdays. If they failed to do so, they forfeited 6d. from their pay. Fines for drunkenness were a week's pay for the first offence, a month's pay for the second, and expulsion for the third "if the Society thincke it not meete upon his Repentance and amendment to pardon it". The scale of punishments for swearing was slightly less rigorous – presumably because the merchants knew what sailors were. They lost a week's pay for the first offence, two week's for the second, a month's for the third, and expulsion only for the fourth. No one was to lodge guests in his or her room more than three nights a year "except in case of sicknesse for the necessary helpe during that tyme". The almsfolk were to take turns weekly in cleaning the public parts of the building – the hall, kitchen and gallery, and monthly turns as Porter when they had the responsibility for opening and locking the gate at the times laid down. They were to wear their free clothing outside the building and at church. Disputes were to be taken in the first place to the Clerk and then to the Master. The Clerk was required to read the orders every pay day.[167]

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[161] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 96; T. J. Manchee, *Bristol Charities*, Bristol 1831, I, 251.

[162] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 99, 100; *Book of Charters 1*, p. 5.

[163] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 100.

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[165] *Ibid.*, p. 113. *The Beadle's Account* for 1696 shows £215 18s. 8d. spent on purchasing land and erecting the building.

[166] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 113.

The Society made a considerable number of small charitable gifts, particularly to those concerned with the sea. These included pensions to decayed merchants and seamen, grants to redeem sailors captured by the Turks, and donations to the widows and dependants of mariners. Thus, in 1623 goodwife Trippett got 20s. for the relief of herself and her children, "her husband being in Captivitie in Algier"[168]; in 1640, Elizabeth Davis, a mariner's widow, was granted a pension of 2s. 6d. a week for the relief and maintenance of herself and six small children;[169] in 1656, John Pearse, a poor seaman, got £3 to help him buy a boat.[170] In 1667 at the time of the second Dutch War, Ann Duncan, wife of a mariner who was prisoner in Middelburg, received 40s. for the relief of herself and her children,[171] and in the third Dutch War, Henry Cott was given £6 "towards the Recovery of his eyesight lately lost in an engagement at sea with a privateer of Holland".[172] In 1673, £10 was voted to Mrs. Hoskins towards the redemption of her husband from captivity in Fez. She was to give security that if he died unredeemed or if his redemption could not be secured within twelve months, she would return the money.[173]

The Society was regarded as a possible source of help by many needy people. In 1685, for example, sixty or so asked for relief, and the auditors of accounts were instructed to distribute £20 at their discretion. Petitions for help were to be received only "for persons relateing to the sea".[174] In 1690, there were about 100 applicants, and the amount to be distributed was fixed at £30.[175]

Relief was given on occasions to members of the Society and their dependants when they were in difficulties. Thus, in 1625 Thomas Hopkins got a pension of £5 a year to continue for four years "if hee lyve soe long"[176]; in 1676, Elizabeth Stephens was granted a pension of 1s. 6d. a week "forasmuch as shee was the daughter of William Stephens merchant deceased a late member and benefactor of this society".[177] In 1693, Martha Cann was given £12 for the education and support of her brothers Thomas and Robert, sons of a former member.[178]

The charity which the Society dispensed in the seventeenth century was on a very modest scale, but it must be remembered that it had only a very small income and a great many commitments. In the Civil War in 1644 it was compelled to stop all pensions, except to residents of the Almshouse, "until God shall enable the Company better to pay the same".[179] What it did give provided some assistance to a variety of people, but particularly to seamen whose wages were pathetically low in relation to the enormous risks they ran.

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[167] *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4; *H.B. 1*, pp, 174–6.
[168] *Treasurer's Book 1*, p. 9.
[169] *H.B. 1*, p. 34.
[170] *H.B. 1*, p. 271.
[171] *H.B. 1*, p. 408.
[172] *H.B. 2*, p. 48.
[173] *H.B. 2*, p. 48.
[174] *H.B. 2*, p. 278.
[175] *H.B. 2*, p. 462.
[176] *Treasurer's Book 1*, p. 12.
[177] *H.B. 2*, p. 90.
[178] *H.B. 2*, p. 542.

The Society's contribution to education was even more modest, but it foreshadowed in a small way the work which the Society was due to undertake on a very large scale later in its history. It took the form mainly of paying a schoolmaster to teach poor mariners' children. Latimer stated that the first mention of the school was in 1621,[180] but this is an error, for in 1595 in a petition to the Privy Council there is a reference to the work of the merchants in maintaining "a free Schoole for mariners' children",[181] and the Society's earliest surviving account in 1610–11 records a payment of £1 6s. 8d. a year to a schoolmaster.[182] There are not many references to the school in the seventeenth century, but it certainly continued. A new schoolmaster was appointed from time to time, and money was spent on the schoolroom, which was in the Hall. When the schoolmaster John Bateman died in 1689, his widow was given a weekly pension of 1s. She gave the Hall thanks "and promised to leave (as Fixed to the house) the benches and other thinges put upp by her late husband and sonn in the house and schoole". Rather charmingly, she presented the Hall with "the draught of the shipp Monck and a draught of the tree of philosophy".[183]

In the early accounts, there are a few references to a man who instructed poor sailors in the art of navigation,[184] but this early link between the Society and technical education does not seem to have continued.

Miscellaneous patronage of religion and learning included a regular payment to the curate who preached to mariners in Shirehampton chapel, an annual gift to the preacher on Charter Day in the Society's parish church of St. Stephen, and an occasional contribution to lecture sermons.[185] In 1667, a gratuity of £10 was given to Samuel Sturmy for "a Booke of the Arte of Navigacion by him dedicated to the Haule";[186] in 1673, James Millerd was presented with a piece of plate of the value of £5, engraved with the arms of the Society, when he presented "his groundplatt of this Citty" to the Society,[187] and next year Richard Blome received £10 "for his civility and respects in presenting us with two volumes of his workes (vizt) A volume of Geography and Traffique, And a volume of Britannia beautifyed with sculptures and dedicated to our society with our Coate of Armes in the front of each volume".[188] There were occasional gifts to undergraduates at Oxford.[189] All this did not amount to a great deal, but once again it must be remembered that the Society's income was limited, and that patronage of learning was peripheral to its main purpose.

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[179] *H.B. 1*, p. 70.

[180] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 82.

[181] *Book of Trade*, p. 39; *Cal. S.P.D. 1595–1598*, pp. 105–6.

[182] *Book of Trade*, General Account 1610–11, "more paide goodman Greene for teaching poore marriners children his fee 001 06 08".

[183] *H.B. 2*, pp. 144–15.

[184] *Book of Trade*. General Account 1618–19: "more is due to have iiij li, paide to Francis Jones for one yeeres fee allowed him for instructing poore sailers in the Arte of Navigacion 004 00 00"; *Treasurer's Book 1*, p. 6 ". . . . more ii li paide to Francis Jones for teaching Navigation ¾ of a yeare 003 00 00".

[185] *Treasurer's Book 1*, pp. 4, 6 (1618–20).

MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

The attitude which the Society took as a corporate body towards exploration and colonisation in the seventeenth century was extremely cautious in spite of the enthusiasm of a few of its members in their private capacity.[190] It is true that it had little money to invest in such enterprises, but it might have done more to live up to its name and to give moral support. It does not seem to have given any official backing to two of its members, Thomas Hopkins and Thomas Aldworth, when they were appointed by the Mayor in 1606 to confer with the inhabitants of Bristol about the development of Virginia,[191] nor to the plantation which another member, John Guy, made in Newfoundland.[192] The Society's first *Book of Charters* records that in 1617–18 "Divers particuler merchantes of this Society Did sett Forwardes the plantacion of a porcion of land in the Country of Newfoundland called Bristolles Hope . . .", but the Society itself was not involved.[193] In the early 1620s, when Sir Ferdinando Gorges tried to whip up support for a settlement in Virginia, the Society was cautious, if not actually discouraging. The Mayor had to inform Sir Ferdinando that the Society had perused his letters but found it "so difficult that at present they cannot Conclude . . .". They wanted more time for consultation with the other ports.[194] Further correspondence did not produce any action. A similar fate befell the proposal from the Earl of Pembroke in 1623–4 concerning a plantation in New England. The merchants said they were "Determined to hould a parte in the saide Plantacion yf the priviledges and Condicions of theire Patent should bee agreeable to the expectacion of this Societie",[195] but nothing further was done.

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[186] For further details, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 115 and note 1.

[187] *Ibid.*, p. 116 and note 1.

[188] *Ibid.*, p. 116 and note 2.

[189] *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 115.

[190] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 199–206.

[191] Bristol Record Office: *C.C.P. 1598–1608*, p. 115.

[192] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 200 and note 2.

[193] *Book of Charters 1*, p. 57; McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

[194] *Book of Trade*, p. 110; McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 201–2.

The one occasion on which the Society did take action was with regard to Captain Thomas James's voyage to discover a North-West Passage.[196] It took a lot of trouble to find a suitable ship and petitioned the King on James's behalf. The Merchant Venturers of Bristol may well have been spurred on by the fact that Captain Luke Foxe was engaged in a similar enterprise and that if he was successful, the Londoners who were backing him would probably ask the King to grant them yet another monopoly. The Society appointed a committee to manage and supply James's ship the *Henrietta Maria* and guaranteed that the master and ship's company would be paid their wages in accordance with a scale laid down. The Society made two payments towards the cost, and these amounted in all to £233 16s. 1d. Presumably the balance of the charges was met by the backers in their individual capacity. In the nature of things, neither expedition could achieve its objective, and the Society's short-lived interest in exploration then came to an end.[197]

The caution which characterised the Society in the early seventeenth century was displayed over another matter – an offer from the crown to allow the outports to farm the customs duties. It was common for groups of Londoners to lease from the King the right to collect customs duties in return for a fixed yearly rent, and the investment could be very profitable to the customs farmers. When the offer was transmitted to the Society through the Mayor in 1621, the Society replied "wee are very fearful to undertake the farming of his Maiesties Customes . . . in regard that our trade is greatly ympaired in respect of the restraincte thereof, and the manifould losses which wee have lately susteyned by the spoyle and Depredacion of Turkishe Pirates whoe prey uppon us and our goodes soe often and in such manner that many of our Society are decayed thereby, and others our Cheifest Dealers . . . have withdrawne their adventures, and doe ymploy the Remainder of their stockes in land and livinges in the Country . . .". They argued that the customs were likely to decrease rather than increase, "the marchantes of this Porte being few and most of them young men and small Adventurers, Desireing rather to contynue the poore trade they now enjoy (untill it shall please god to enlarge the same) then any way to undergoe the care and Charge of soe waightie and doubtful a matter".[198] The answer was plain, even though the reasons given need not be taken too seriously.

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[195] *Book of Charters I*, p. 96.

[196] For this expedition, see C. M. MacInnes, *Captain Thomas James and the North West Passage*, Bristol Branch of the Historial Association, 1967; *The Voyages of Captain Luke Foxe of Hull and Captain Thomas James of Bristol in search of a North-West Passage in 1631–32*, edit. Miller Christy, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, 1894.

[197] For some of the documents in the case, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 204–6.

Another scheme which came to nothing was a proposal in 1672 and 1683 that the Society should pay a rent not exceeding £600 a year for the right to issue wine licences in the city and four miles round. The Society wanted to prevent the vintners getting the right to issue licences, for if they did, "they would confine the trade of wines to the great prejudice of his maiesties customes and hold the merchants to their owne humours as to prices etc.". In 1683 when the vintners had apparently procured the right, the Society endeavoured to obtain the privilege itself "for the benefitt of this Hall". Equally abortive was a suggestion of Sir Robert Yeamans in the same year that the Society should build lighters.[199]

On the other hand, the Society did on occasions engage in the bulk purchase of strangers' goods. Non-freemen, or strangers, who brought goods to Bristol were required by the city ordinances to deposit them in Spicer's Hall on the Back of Bristol and to offer them there for sale to freemen. In 1642, a quantity of wine was offered for sale to the Society, and a committee was chosen by lot to deal for the wine and to offer it to members of the Society who wished to participate in the bargain. More than fifty members put their names down.[200] A similar arrangement was made in 1643 over wine, almonds and fruit brought from Hamburg, and this time there were 63 subscribers.[201] Other bargains were made in 1648, 1664 and 1667, but after that the Society seems to have abandoned the practice.[202]

As its income and importance grew, the Society, like its individual members, increased its holding of real property. This served both as a source of income and as a status symbol. In the course of the period, it acquired a number of premises in Bristol either in its own right or as a trustee,[203] but by far the most important acquisition in the long run was the manor of Clifton. Clifton was still primarily a rural area with a small population and a dozen or so farms, together with considerable manorial waste. Although Bristol was expanding in the seventeenth century, it is unlikely that the Society was thinking in terms of building development at some future date. It was probably attracted by the possibility of a safe investment in land held mostly on leases of 99 years for three lives, producing fines

[198] *Book of Trade*, pp. 99, 100; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 133.

[199] McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 134.

[200] *H.B. 1*, p. 55, 28 June 1642; McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 128.

[201] *H.B. 1*, p. 61v, 28 Nov. 1643; McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–9.

[202] *H.B. 1*, pp. 134, 135, 367, 412; McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–30.

[203] For example, a lease of a house in Castle Street from the Dean and Chapter and the George Inn and some adjacent houses in Castle Street.

whenever the lease ran out or a life was renewed. It was conveniently near Bristol from the point of view of management. Perhaps the growing interest in the medicinal qualities of the Hotwell, and the wharfage lease of 1661 which required the Society to make a road for coach and horses from Rownham Passage to the Hotwell, turned the Society's attention in the first place to the riverside area of Clifton. In 1661, the Society proposed to negotiate for the purchase of the Hotwell and the adjacent waste ground, but nothing came of this.[204] Then, in 1676 a committee was set up to treat for and buy the manor of Clifton and any other lands in fee for a sum not exceeding £2,000.[205] A three-quarter share in the manor was purchased for £1,704 4s. 6d., and loans were raised from members to help with cost.[206] There was, however, a dispute about title, involving a chancery suit and mediation before it could be recorded in the *Book of Charters* in 1676–7 that "a good estate in Fee simply was granted to this Society in trust for the whole as by deedes and assureances in our public chest will appeare."[207] Another small manor in the parish of Clifton was acquired in 1686,[208] and further property was bought for £911 15s. in 1699.[209]

The Society thus became a landowner of some importance. The estate was mainly rural and was not ripe for development for a long time, but there might have been possibilities with the Hotwell. In 1683, two men were allowed to hold the spring "during pleasure" for 10s. a year, and this was increased to 40s. in 1687. At the same time, a committee was instructed to put in a new spout and repair the well. A wall was built round the spring in 1691 to keep out the tidal waters. Eventually, however, the Society decided that it would hand over the exploitation of the Hotwell to a group of developers, including Sir Thomas Day and Robert Yate, who had twice been Master of the Society. In April 1695, the group was given a 90 year lease at £5 a year, provided it spent £500 within three years on building a Pump House and lodging houses and making other provision for visitors.[210] Thus, for much of the eighteenth century, the Society lost the opportunity of exploiting the Hotwell during a period when it was to attract large numbers of visitors.

At the end of the seventeenth century, the Society of Merchant Venturers could look with satisfaction on a number of remarkable achievements. It had developed its constitution, it had engaged with considerable success in a great variety of activities, and it had become part of Bristol's way of life. Its interests were probably more closely identified with that of the community as a whole than in any subsequent period. Its income was growing, it had become an important property-owner, and it could face with experience and confidence the new challenges of the eighteenth century.

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[204] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 203.

[205] *H.B. 2*, p. 95.

[206] *Treasurer's Book 2*, p. 34.

[207] *Book of Charters 1*, pp. 201, 203; *Treasurer's Book 2*, p. 35.

[208] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 167.

[209] *Treasurer's Book 2*, p. 69.

[210] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 168–9; *H.B. 3*, p. 4. For further details about the Hot Well, see V. Waite, *The Bristol Hotwell*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1960.

CHAPTER 6

The Eighteenth Century: Bristol's Golden Age

THE compact city which the Society of Merchant Venturers dominated in the seventeenth century was impressively changed in the course of the next hundred years. If a medieval merchant had returned to Bristol in 1700, he would have been more or less at home in his environment, for the city was still basically contained within its medieval limits. By 1800, it had spread out in all directions, and a remarkable amount of Georgian building had transformed not only the size but the character of ancient Bristol.

A major factor in this transformation was the population explosion of the eighteenth century. The population of the country as a whole increased from about 5½ million to over 10 million, but in a number of towns the rate of growth was even greater. Although Bristol did not grow as rapidly as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, its population probably increased between 2½ and 3 fold and had risen to about 64,000 at the time of the first census in 1801.[1] The rate of increase was not uniform,[2] but the overall effect was growth of a kind not hitherto experienced, and this must have had psychological as well as physical effects. The wealthier citizen at least must have felt that they were living in a boom-town, and this may account for some of the materialism and brashness which many visitors found objectionable.

A glance at the 1773 and 1800 editions of Benjamin Donn's map of Bristol will show how much Bristol had changed since Millerd made his plan in 1673. Growth had taken place in all directions around the core of the ancient city, but it was particularly marked towards the north and the west. The Society of Merchant Venturers must have watched with satisfaction the expansion towards Clifton and Hotwells, in which they had so much land suitable for development.

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[1] See Walter Minchinton, *The Trade of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xx, 1957, p. ix. Minchinton puts the population at about 20,000 in 1700. Bryan Little thinks it was between 25,000 and 27,000 (*City and County of Bristol*, 1954, Appendix 1). B. R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge, 1962, gave the following figures for the major towns in 1801: Bristol, 61,000; Greater London, 1,117,000; Birmingham, 71,000; Liverpool, 82,000; Manchester, 75,000; Edinburgh, 83,000; Glasgow, 77,000.

[2] There seems to have been a rapid expansion in the first part of the century, a levelling-off between 1730–70, and then further expansion until the 1790s. (See Bryan Little, *op. cit.*, Appendix 1 for a discussion of the changes.) Variations for the 1801 figure arise from differences about precisely which areas should be included in Bristol.

The changing appearance of Bristol was as remarkable as its physical growth.[3] Much remained of the old high-gabled houses and narrow streets, but changing tastes and increasing wealth produced new Georgian building in the city and suburbs. Fortunately, an era of prosperity coincided with a time when architectural standards were high and when Bristolians were able to command the services of first-rate designers and craftsmen.

The metamorphosis of Bristol was in part a response to new economic needs and to the growth of population, and in part a reflection of social changes. Merchants, professional men and others with money no longer found it so desirable to live in the heart of the crowded city and began to reside in the more spacious suburbs in houses which reflected the importance of their owners. The Corporation granted the first leases for building in the noble Queen Square in 1699, and this early piece of town-planning was completed by 1727. The Square included a fine new Customs House, erected in 1710–11, but it was primarily residential. Outbuildings were not to be let as workshops to tradesmen "who by noyse, danger of Fire or ill smells shall disturbe or annoy any of the Inhabitants . . .".[4] Other squares followed, although their completion was often spread over a considerable period.[5] In addition, there were many new streets, parades, crescents and groups of houses in which the ground landlords, the lessees, and the speculative builders cooperated to produce excellent examples of planned buildings for the well-to-do. For those who could afford them, there were opportunities for putting up gentlemen's residences, such as the Royal Fort, Clifton Hill House, Redland Court and Arno's Court, which were conveniently situated near the city but away from the built-up areas.

New private building went hand in hand with new public building and town-improvement. Between 1701 and 1704, the Corporation rebuilt the Council House.[6] In 1743, after long delay, its plans for building an Exchange "for the assembling of the Merchants" materialised when John Wood's masterpiece was formally opened by the Mayor, Sir Abraham Elton, who was a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers.[7] In the seventeen-sixties, the Corporation obtained an Act of Parliament enabling it to carry out extensive demolition and reconstruction in the heart of the old city and to build a new bridge over the Avon, thus sweeping away another link with the medieval past.[8] The many new eighteenth-century buildings included the Barber Surgeons' Hall, the Merchant Taylors' Hall, the Coopers' Hall, the Post Office, the Assembly Rooms, a new city library and costly reconstruction of many of the medieval churches. The contribution of the Society of Merchant Venturers to the modernisation of Bristol included the rebuilding of their Hall in the second decade of the century, extensive reconstruction by Thomas Paty in the seventeen-eighties, major works in the harbour and quays, the development of the Hotwell and its Colonnade, and the granting of building leases in Clifton and elsewhere.

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[3] For an examination of these developments, see Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol*, 1952.

[4] For Queen Square, see Ison, *op. cit.*, pp. 140–8.

[5] King Square 1737–72; Dowry Square 1762; Brunswick Square between 1766 and the 1780s; Berkeley Square and Portland Square in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Details in Ison, *op. cit.*

[6] Ison, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–9.

The city could not have developed in this way unless there had been considerable economic growth. It is easy to think of the wealth of Bristol in the eighteenth century as being based almost entirely on trade and to forget that Bristol was also an important industrial centre and "a western metropolis" which supplied a great variety of services to the surrounding areas.[9] In the late eighteenth century, a contemporary expressed the view that Bristol was "not more a commercial than a manufacturing town", and numerous glass-houses, sugar-houses, distilleries, ship-building yards, rope-walks and other manufactories in and near Bristol gave point to his remark.[10] In 1729, Walter Churchman took out a patent for making chocolate by means of an engine – a patent which he later sold to Joseph Fry. Henry Overton Wills joined an existing Bristol tobacco business in 1786. The list of eighteenth-century Bristol industries is a long one. Although the city did not experience an industrial revolution comparable with that of the northern and midland towns, it certainly did not live by trade alone.

Bristol exploited in full measure its favourable position as the centre of a great regional trade. As Professor Minchinton has pointed out, wheat from the midlands, barley and oats from Wales, peas and beans from Gloucestershire and Somerset, cattle from South Wales, and cheese from Cheshire found their way by road, river and sea to the western metropolis. Timber from the Forest of Dean, tin from Cornwall, coal from Bristol and Somerset coalfields, copper from Anglesey came into Bristol or passed out from it to the large region which it served. Nearly a hundred regular carrier services to and from London, Leeds, Nottingham and other towns indicated the importance of Bristol in the national economy. The growth of the canal system, in which Bristol played little part, was before the end of the century to rob Bristol of some of its advantages, but in the meantime economic development, even in distant parts of the country, contributed to its prosperity.

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[7] Ison, *op. cit.*, pp. 95–104.

[8] Ison, *op. cit.*, pp. 115–23.

[9] See Walter Minchinton, "Bristol – Metropolis of the West in the Eighteenth Century", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 4, 1954, pp. 69–89.

[10] For a number of contemporary comments on the industries of Bristol, see Peter T. Marcy, *Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1966. See also Walter Minchinton, "Bristol – Metropolis of the West", *supra.*

This western metropolis offered numerous services to the neighbouring areas.[11] The first Bristol bank was established in 1750, and six more were added before the end of the century.[12] The first provincial fire insurance office was established in the city in 1718. Bristol capital played an important part in the development of industry in the region, particularly in South Wales. The numerous inns provided for large numbers of visitors, and the Hotwell, in which the Society of Merchant Venturers had an interest, added to the attraction.[13]

The increasing diversification of economic activity in eighteenth-century Bristol may have reduced in some degree the dominance of those who were engaged exclusively in foreign trade. The number of people who became free of the city as "merchants" increased a little compared with the seventeenth century, but there were only about 200 "merchants" at any one time, and a great deal of Bristol business must have been in the hands of men who were not technically merchants and who did not specialise in overseas commerce. Nevertheless, foreign trade remained of paramount importance and gave Bristol its special significance in national life.

There were considerable fluctuations in the volume of trade, but the overall expansion in the eighteenth century was impressive.[14] In 1700, 240 ships arrived from ports outside Great Britain. In 1791, the number was 485. Ships were getting larger in the period, and the total tonnage rose from about 20,000 at the beginning to 76,000 at the end. It was, however, a diversified trade. Although by the end of the century some merchants were increasingly specialising in particular markets, the merchant community as a whole did not put all its eggs into one basket. Of the 485 ships arriving in the port in 1787, 185 came from Europe, 161 from Ireland, 76 from the West

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[11] See Peter T. Marcy and Walter Minchinton, *op. cit., passim.*

[12] C. H. Cave, *A History of Banking in Bristol, from 1750 to 1899*, Bristol, 1899.

[13] For the Hotwell, see Vincent Waite, *The Bristol Hotwell*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1960.

[14] For a detailed examination of the nature and course of the trade, see Walter Minchinton, *The Trade of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol Record Society, xx, 1957, and *The Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1962.

Indies, 44 from America and 15 from Africa.[15] Slaves, sugar, rum and tobacco were only part of the story.

In spite of this great expansion, the commercial importance of Bristol had by the end of the century suffered a decline in comparison with the trade of the country considered as a whole. At the beginning of the period, Bristol was the second largest port in the country. By 1800, she was, in terms of ships, tonnage and men, only eighth among the outports.[16] This did not mean that her merchants were less wealthy than they had been at the beginning. Indeed, they were a good deal richer, but they operated in a city which was nationally less significant and less prestigious than it had been earlier.

Various reasons have been put forward for this *relative* decline.[17] They include the industrialisation of Lancashire and the advantages which this gave to Liverpool; improved communications, which channelled the trade of the midlands through Liverpool rather than Bristol; the decline in the West Indian and American trades; and the failure to modernise the port of Bristol quickly enough and to reduce sufficiently the charges on ships which used it. Professor Pares thought that in the later eighteenth century the merchants themselves were less aggressively competitive than their rivals in other ports and suggested that "it would not have been very genteel for fellow-members of a small dining-club, connected together by the marriage of their children, to wage war to the knife by cutting freight rates or instructing their captains to snatch consignments from each other's ships . . .".[18] Professor Pares' suggestion is not very convincing, since a great many merchants in Bristol did not in fact belong to "a small dining club" and as far as the Merchant Venturers were concerned, many members did not even attend meetings.[19] No single factor explains the relative decline in trade, and one must always bear in mind that the total volume was in fact increasing. It may be that many Bristol merchants found that on the whole they were doing well and preferred to enjoy their wealth rather than to take great pains to acquire even more.

Throughout the century, the government of the city remained in the hands of a closed Corporation of 42 members which in 1710 obtained a new Charter confirming its privileges and extending its powers.[20] John Latimer characterised the Corporation as "a narrow oligarchy of mercantile families" which, he said, "practically repudiated its duties while tenaciously asserting its rights".[21]

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[15] Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, p. xv.

[16] Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, p. ix.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. xv.

[18] R. Pares, *A West India Fortune*, p. 212.

[19] See pp. 104–5.

[20] For the 1710 Charter, see R. C. Latham, *Bristol Charters, 1509–1899*, Bristol Record Society, xii, 1946, pp. 59–60, 210–12.

[21] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 30.

Latimer looked at the eighteenth-century Corporation through the eyes of a nineteenth-century liberal nonconformist, and he had no difficulty in finding numerous examples of ostentation, inefficiency, lethargy and corruption. The Corporation regarded its funds as its own, and it was answerable to no one. Certainly, in the last decade of the century it was extremely unpopular, so that burgesses were unwilling to accept the "mock dignity and real odium of a Bristol Corporator".[22] The record of the Corporation is in some respects not as bad as Latimer suggested, and it is difficult to say whether it was worse or better than that of other eighteenth-century Corporations. Nevertheless, the Corporation often lacked the means or the will to exercise effective control over the fortunes of a great and growing city. Ineffective leadership may well have been an important factor in the failure of Bristol to cope with new problems.

It might be argued that this lack of leadership was also found in some degree in the body to which the Corporation had handed over the control of the port, the Society of Merchant Venturers. The Society was well represented on the Corporation and, as Professor Minchinton points out, it was the largest organised group which had representation in the city government.[23] It cannot, however, be assumed that those Merchant Venturers who were members of the Corporation acted as a united pressure group, and the Society's hold on the Corporation was weaker than it had been in the seventeenth century. Between 1599 and 1699 approximately 150 of those who served as Master, Warden or Treasurer of the Society were members of the Common Council. The corresponding figure for the eighteenth century was 67.[24] In most matters the Society and the Corporation cooperated in this period, but Merchant Venturers did not dominate the city government to the same extent as they did in the seventeenth century.

During these years, Bristol enjoyed a vigorous political life. Political clubs such as the Tory Steadfast Society and the Whig Union Club flourished in the city, and politics were not the concern merely of the wealthier citizens. The electorate was large, and bribery and other electioneering tactics were often essential to secure the return of a candidate in faction-ridden Bristol. Elections gave the freemen of Bristol, who numbered several thousands, ample opportunity for self-expression in demonstrations and counter-demonstrations. Mercantile interests in general, and those of the Society of Merchant Venturers in particular, were well represented in

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[22] Quoted by S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, iii, 469, note 4, from *Letters on the Port and Trade of Bristol* (J. B. Kington).

[23] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xvi–xvii.

[24] Based on an analysis of the list of Common Councillors in A. B. Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, Bristol, 1899.

Parliament by M.P.s who were merchants or closely connected with merchants. Occasionally, the city looked further afield for its members and chose men prominent in public life, such as Robert Nugent, later Lord Clare, or Edmund Burke. One thing above all was expected of the Members for Bristol, whether they were local men or distinguished outsiders – unremitting attention to everything which affected the city's interests. Bristol worked its M.P.s hard, and the Corporation and the Society, as well as other pressure groups, were for ever briefing the members on what they must do. Edmund Burke was not the only Bristol M.P. who found that the electorate would turn on him if he took a line of his own on issues about which Bristolians felt strongly.[25]

It is not easy to assess the importance of religion in a city in which business and politics seemed to be the major preoccupations. Latimer leaves his readers with the general impression that the bishopric was a poor one, occupied for the most part by men who moved on as soon as they could to better things; that the dean and chapter, who also had limited incomes, were noted for their quarrelsomeness, their absenteeism and their pluralism, and that the parish livings were too poor to attract men of distinction.[26] It may indeed have been the relative poverty of the church in this opulent city which led to the critical comment that "the very clergy talk of nothing but trade and how to turn a penny".[27] Certainly, the Society of Merchant Venturers showed a proper appreciation of the helpfulness of the clergy when it ordered the printing, at the cost of the Hall, of a sermon preached on Charter Day 1744 in which the Rev. A. S. Catcott, rector of St. Stephen's, took as his text "Tyre, the Crowning City, whose Merchants are Princes, whose Traffickers are the honourable of the Earth". After praising commerce at some length, Catcott concluded "Thus have I finished my design, and shewn you both the antiquity and honourableness of the practice of merchandize; and the result of all is this, the merchant, in exerting his honest and laudable endeavours, may justly hope for the blessing of God, is intitled to the favour and protection of his prince, and deserves the love and esteem of his fellow-subjects."[28]

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[25] P. T. Underdown, *Bristol and Burke*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1961; "Edmund Burke as Member of Parliament for Bristol", unpublished London Ph.D. thesis, 1955; "Edmund Burke, the commissary of his Bristol constituents", *English Historical Review*, lxxiii, 1958. See also Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xvii–xviii.

[26] *Eighteenth Century Annals*, *passim*. For a less critical view, see Rupert E. Davies, "Religious Movements in Bristol since the Reformation", in *Bristol and its Adjoining Counties*, edit. C. M. MacInnes and W. F. Whittard, Bristol, 1955.

[27] E. H. Meyerstein, *Chatterton*, p. 20.

[28] The sermon was printed in Bristol in 1744. There is a copy in the Merchants' Hall.

The impression that religious vitality was to be found only in the nonconformist communities in the city is to some extent off-set by the fact that a number of parishes spent a great deal of money on preserving and "beautifying" their churches. In part, this was forced upon them by the imminent collapse of the fabric or by the reconstruction of the street plan of the city, but it was also due to a desire to adapt the buildings to the needs of a new age. Only too often, restoration

> Has left for contemplation
> Not what there used to be

and no doubt some of it was done for the glory of the parishioners, but it may well be that the glory of God was also taken into account.[29]

To this extensive building programme, both the Corporation and the Society made considerable contributions.[30] Then, as later, the Society was a pillar of the established church. Although for a short time it excluded Quakers from membership, and on one occasion showed anti-Jewish tendencies,[31] it did not officially impose any religious tests, but most of its members belonged to the Church of England. On Charter Day, they attended the parish church of St. Stephen and heard a sermon, for which the preacher received a suitable fee. Methodism made great strides in Bristol and influenced a number of industrialists, but its enthusiasm did not affect Merchant Venturers.

The social structure of eighteenth-century Bristol has not as yet been investigated in any depth. It has been said that, broadly speaking, there was a two-class and not a three-class society, and that although there was a middle class and a lower class, the city could not boast of a noble or aristocratic class.[32] This is basically true, but it over-simplifies the class structure. There were a number of people who thought of themselves as "gentry", and even within the broad divisions of middle and lower class, there were considerable gradations of wealth and status. The merchants themselves ranged from the very rich to those of extremely modest fortunes. The same was true of the industrialists and the various professional groups such as the lawyers, the physicians, the sea-captains and the office-holders. The middle classes shaded imperceptibly into the lower classes, which included well-to-do craftsmen as well as labourers who earned a bare sufficiency.

The problem of poverty became increasingly serious in eighteenth-century England, and Bristol, like other towns, had to make some provision for a large urban proletariat which could be brought to the verge of starvation by bad harvests or fluctuations in trade. The charitable activities of the Society of Merchant Venturers formed part of a combined effort of public bodies and private individuals to deal with an intractable problem. At the end of the seventeenth century, largely as a result of the efforts of a Merchant Venturer, John Cary, the Bristol parishes had been brought under a single poor law authority – the Bristol Corporation of the Poor.[33] The poor rates raised by the Corporation of the Poor were often inadequate to meet the need, and the City had to help by making loans and by buying corn to sell cheap to the poor when prices were abnormally high. There were a number of endowed almshouses, and numerous charitable gifts and legacies from individuals, but the problem of poverty remained very serious. Even the rich experienced a certain insecurity in a world in which commercial or industrial depression could easily lead to bankruptcy.[34] A surprisingly large number of wealthy men and their dependents were eventually driven to asking for pensions from the city or from the Society of Merchant Venturers.[35]

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[29] For further details of the extensive and costly reconstruction of churches, see Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol*, and Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*.

[30] See p. 207.

[31] See pp. 103 and n. 8, 104 n. 19, 234.

[32] Peter Marcy, *Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians*, p. 15.

The fact that there was a large class in Bristol which had no property and which lived very near the poverty line helps to explain the frequent civil disturbances, particularly in the first half of the century. The Bristol mob could be roused by a variety of grievances, including high prices for provisions, depression in industry and trade, reduction of wages, hostility to dissenters, and the erection of toll gates around the city.[36] The presence of the turbulent coalmining community at Kingswood, a short distance from Bristol, made the threat to public order all the more serious. In the riots of 1753, when food prices were high, and in the Bridge Riots of 1793, when fierce resentment was aroused against the Bridge Trustees and the Corporation by the continuance of tolls after they were due to expire, there was considerable loss of life and damage to property.

The property-owning classes must have been concerned at the threat of mob violence and at the lack of adequate policing in the badly-lit streets. In the daytime, the respectable citizen could at least rely to some extent on support from his fellows, but at night the hazards were much greater. In 1736, the Justices of the Peace for Bristol ordered that 51 able-bodied men should be employed to supplement the watchmen, one of whom was responsible for each of the twelve wards, but the magistrates had no power to levy a rate, and the Corporation gave no help.[37] In 1753, the Corporation itself decided to apply to Parliament for powers to impose a watch rate. Not surprisingly, the Society of Merchant Venturers gave the bill enthusiastic support in a petition which stated that "the regulating and supporting of a nightly watch . . . is a matter of the greatest consequence to the inhabitants of the city for the preservation of their lives and properties, and the want of proper legal authority for effecting that good purpose hath long been sensibly felt and lamented".[38] The bill eventually passed, in spite of considerable opposition in Bristol. Although it did something to strengthen the watch system, it was not until well into the nineteenth century, after Bristol had had the traumatic experience of the Riots of 1831, that it gradually became convinced of the need for an effective police force. In the eighteenth-century, many of the propertied classes were prepared to live dangerously rather than give increased powers to the municipal oligarchy.[39]

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[33] See E. E. Butcher, *The Bristol Corporation of the Poor, 1696–1834*, Bristol Record Society, iii, 1931, and *The Bristol Corporation of the Poor 1696–1898*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1972.

[34] For the long list of bankruptcies of Bristol merchants between 1711 and 1770, see Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, pp. 184–6.

[35] For pensions granted by the Society to its own members, see p. 206. For the even more generous way in which the Corporation handed out pensions, see Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 69, 120, 128, 187, 206, 219, 238, 243, 263, 302, 361, 381, 402, 420, 436.

[36] For the riots of 1709, 1714, 1727, 1728–9, 1738, 1749, 1753 and the dramatic Bridge Riots of 1793, in which at least 11 people were killed, and nearly 50 injured, see Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*.

Numerous visitors came to Bristol in the eighteenth century, and from their writings we get a general impression of how the city and its people appeared to outsiders. They were impressed by its industry and its commerce, but they did not much admire the people who ran them.[40] Daniel Defoe thought that the minds of "the generality of its People" were narrow, and that the merchants, although rich, ought to be a "little more polite and generous". They would be well advised to travel to London where they would see "examples worth their imitation, as well for Princely Spirit, as upright and generous dealings". A visitor from Ireland remarked that "their Souls are engrossed by lucre, and (they are) very expert in affairs of merchandize; but as to politeness, it is a thing banished from their republic as a contagious distemper". Thomas Cox wrote "the People give themselves to Trade so entirely, that nothing of the Politeness and Gaiety of Bath is seen here . . . the Trade of many Nations is drawn hither by the Industry and Opulency of the People. This makes them remarkably insolent to Strangers, as well as ungrateful to Benefactors, both naturally arising from being bred and become rich by Trade, as (to use their own Phrase) to care for no Body, but whom they can gain by. . . ."

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[37] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 197.

[38] *Infra*, p. 232.

[39] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p, 527.

[40] For a survey of the comments made by visitors, see Peter Marcy, *Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians.*

Although there was a critical note in the comments of visitors throughout the century, the more savage remarks seem to have been made in the first half, and it is possible that they were referring to the early stages of an acquisitive community when men were battling for wealth in a jungle world. The descendants of those who had grown rich possibly took things more easily and found time for other interests besides the pursuit of gain. The rowdy Jacob's Well playhouse gave place to the much more dignified Theatre Royal, and the development of the Bristol Hotwell helped to introduce a civilising element into the life of the community. In 1756, a new Assembly Room was opened in Prince Street for concerts and dancing, and although a critic referred to it sneeringly as a place

Where in dull solemnity of wigs
The dancing bears of commerce murdered jigs

it was another sign of the times and an indication that in the second half of the century, the business community was being influenced by polite society.[41]

Although Bristol society was possibly becoming more civilised, commercial and industrial growth was not matched by similar developments in education.[42] A little was done for the poorer section of the community by the establishment of new Charity Schools in the parishes, and the two Hospitals, Queen Elizabeth's and Red Maids', continued to provide vocational training and a modicum of formal education for orphans and other unfortunates. There were four Grammar Schools but the quality of education depended to a great extent on the ability of the headmaster and the interest shown by the Governors. The Cathedral School seems to have suffered from lack of money and indifference on the part of the Dean and Chapter. The Bristol Grammer School was highly favoured by the Corporation at the expense of Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, which in 1766 was compelled, by very dubious means, to exchange with the Grammar School the new building it had acquired early in the eighteenth century, and to move to the Grammar School's very unsatisfactory premises at the bottom of Christmas Steps.[43] In the first sixty years or so of the eighteenth century, Bristol Grammar School flourished under a number of able headmasters, and the

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[41] For an interesting and highly critical account of Bristol life in this period, see R. I. James, "Bristol Society in the Eighteenth Century", in *Bristol and Its Adjoining Counties*, edit. C. M. MacInnes and W. F. Whittard, Bristol, 1955.

[42] For a short survey of education in Bristol, see Roger Wilson, "Bristol Schools", in *Bristol and its Adjoining Counties*.

[43] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 374 ff., and C. P. Hill, *A History of Bristol Grammar Schools*, 1951, pp. 53 ff. In 1780, Queen Elizabeth's Hospital suffered another severe blow when the Corporation, which was in debt to the Hospital, decided that the Hospital was in fact heavily in debt to the Corporation.

Corporation took considerable interest in it,[44] but under Charles Lee (Headmaster from 1746 to 1811) it suffered a remarkable decline, and by the early nineteenth century it did not have a single pupil.[45] As far as the wealthier classes were concerned, the deficiencies of the Grammar Schools appear to have been supplied to some extent by the large number of private schools for both sexes.[46] In this somewhat limited educational activity, the Society of Merchant Venturers became heavily involved from the early eighteenth century when Edward Colston entrusted to it the management of a large new Hospital for 100 boys who were to be taught reading, writing, arithmetic and the doctrines of the Church of England.[47]

It was against this background of prejudice and of promise that the Society of Merchant Venturers carried on its remarkably varied activities in what has been called, with some justification, Bristol's Golden Age.

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[44] C. P. Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 38 ff.

[45] C. P. Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 52 ff.

[46] C. P. Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 53 ff; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*.

[47] See p. 209 ff.

CHAPTER 7

Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Eighteenth Century

THE number of members of the Society was less than 100 in the later seventeenth century. In the first three decades of the eighteenth century it rose gradually, and then more rapidly, until it reached 145 in the years 1738–40. There was a decline in the seventeen-forties and seventeen-fifties when membership was normally a little over 120. After that, there were some fluctuations, but, generally the number remained around 120 until the seventeen-nineties. There was a drop in the last decade, and on 10 November 1799, the number on the roll was only 100, of whom 12 were honorary members.[1]

Excluding honorary members, 366 merchants were admitted to the Society between 1701 and 1799.[2] Of these, 211 came in by apprenticeship, 21 by patrimony, 49 by redemption on payment of forty shillings,[3] and 83 by payment of a substantial entry fine. Out of the total of 366, 228 were admitted in the first half of the century, and 138 in the second half. The fall in admissions between 1751 and 1799 was due to a reduction in the number admitted by apprenticeship and to a decrease in the number admitted by fine.[4]

On the other hand, there was a considerable increase in the number of honorary members. The freedom was given to Ministers of the Crown, to Members of Parliament and to distinguished soldiers and sailors who would add dignity to the Society and who might be able to help it in various ways. Only 9 honorary members were admitted between 1700 and 1750, but the total in the second half of the century was 50.[5] On 10 November 1770, out of a total membership of 127, no less than 27 were in this category.[6]

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[1] These figures are based on an examination of several hundred lists of members given in the *Hall Books*. The Clerk wrote out a complete list before each General Meeting and marked the names of those present when the roll was called, but he did not always have up-to-date information about who was still alive.

[2] See list of admissions printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 209 ff.

[3] These were sons of members born after their fathers' admission to the Society. See *H.B. 3*, 8 Oct. 1706.

[4] The number of apprentices admitted in each quarter of the century was as follows: 1701–25, 73; 1726–50, 66; 1751–75, 29; 1775–99, 42. The figures for those admitted by patrimony in these periods were: 6, 7, 9 and nil; by redemption on payment of 40s.: 10, 12, 13, 14; by payment of an entry fine, 37, 16 (of whom 11 were in 1737), 16, 14.

The decline in the number of admissions to the Society in the second half of the eighteenth century finds a parallel in the decline of the number of people taking up the freedom of Bristol as merchants. The total number so doing in the eighteenth century was 639, but 378 of these became free in the first half of the century, and only 261 in the second.[7] It might, therefore, appear that the Society's numbers went down because there were fewer merchants in the city as a whole and that there were consequently fewer potential recruits, but it is doubtful if this is the real explanation. Foreign trade was expanding, and although in the second half of the century there were fewer men who were free of the city as "merchants", there must have been many more who were in fact engaged in foreign trade. A Bristolian did not have to be free of the city as a *merchant* in order to engage in trade overseas. Why, then, did the Society's numbers decline?

The main explanation is that the Society made entry more difficult. It did not apply any political or religious test, although for a short time it specifically excluded Quakers,[8] but it raised the entry fines. They had been quite small in the seventeenth century, but in 1713 the minimum entry fine was fixed at £50.[9] This was raised to £100 in 1725[10] and to £200 in 1730.[11] In 1783, it was reduced to £100 for the purpose of admitting 11 members and was then immediately raised to £250.[12] Whereas in the first quarter of the century, 37 members came in by payment of fines, ranging from £25 to £50, only 16 entered in this way between 1725 and 1750, and 11 of these were admitted at the reduced rate of £100. Between 1738 and 1765, no one was willing to pay the required £250. The fine was reduced to £150 in 1765,[13] and 16 men were ready to pay this amount, but it was raised again to £200 in 1768,[14] and it remained there for the rest of the century. Only 14 men were willing to pay the necessary £200 in the last quarter of the century.

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[5] For a list of honorary members, with dates of admission, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 191 ff.

[6] *H.B. 9*, 10 Nov. 1770.

[7] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. xiv.

[8] In 1711, Charles Harford was refused admission, "he being a professed Quaker". In future, no professed Quaker was to be admitted by fine. Whether Quakers would be excluded if they sought admission by apprenticeship or patrimony was not stated. They would presumably have had difficulty with the oath of admission. (*H.B. 3*, 20 Dec. 1711.) In 1720, this order was repealed. No reason was given (*H.B. 4*, 18 July 1720).

[9] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 222.

[10] *H.B. 5*, 9 July 1725.

[11] *H.B. 5*, 5 Oct. 1730.

[12] *H.B. 6*, 17 Jan. 1738.

[13] *H.B. 9*, 21 Oct. 1765 (only 13 members were present).

[14] *H.B. 9*, 3 Sept. 1768.

Admission by apprenticeship was also made more difficult. On 29 October 1765, the Hall decided that no one should be enrolled as an apprentice unless he had paid an apprenticeship premium of at least £300 or was related to the person to whom he was bound apprentice.[15]

From this it is clear that the Society was adopting a restrictive policy. It was no longer eager to bring in all those engaged in foreign trade, as it had been in the seventeenth century. It was not even concerned to recruit all the wealthy merchants, unless they would agree to pay large entry fines. There were certainly merchants of substance in Bristol who could have afforded to pay the entry fine, but who chose not to do so.[16] The Society did not shrink dramatically in numbers as a result of this policy, but it tended to become more of a cosy little club with limited membership restricted to certain closely-related families than a body representing all the major mercantile interests in Bristol. As the amount of charitable property which the Society controlled increased, and as the value of its own property went up, it may have felt more inclined to restrict entry. Membership of so dignified a body, of which many distinguished national figures condescended to become honorary members, was not to be granted cheaply to outsiders. If they did not choose to come in on the Society's terms, the Society could get along without them.[17]

This oligarchic tendency was even more significant since the majority of members throughout the century did not attend Hall meetings. Even in the first half of the century when membership was large, attendances of over 50 were rare, and those of less than 20 not unknown.[18] From the mid-century onwards, it was common for the number present to be between 10 and 20. Only 26 members out of a total of 118 were present at the election of officers on 10 November 1753,[19] and only 19 out of 107 at the election on 10

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[15] *H.B. 9*, 29 Oct. 1765.

[16] Minchinton, *Port and Politics*, p. xv, gives a few examples of important merchants who did not join. It would be easy to add to the list. Professor Minchinton argues that the Society did, nevertheless, represent Bristol's major trading interests (Africa and the West Indies), but that Ireland, Europe and America, were poorly represented (*ibid.*, pp. xiii–xiv). The point will be examined later when we consider the Society's relationships with other organisations and groups in the city.

[17] It might be argued that the size of the Hall, then, as in later periods, determined the optimum number. There was a problem, for example, in 1708 about the number who could comfortably dine in the Hall (Minchinton, *Port and Politics*, p. xiv, note 3), but in view of the small number of members who turned up to meetings in the eighteenth century, this cannot normally have been serious.

[18] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 223 suggests much higher figures, but they are not substantiated by the evidence.

[19] *H.B. 8*, 10 Nov. 1753. The meeting empowered the Standing Committee to

November 1758.[20] There were, of course, fluctuations, and from time to time an important or controversial issue produced larger numbers. At a debate on the cost of the Floating Dock on 20 April 1773, when the estimates were ordered to be printed and when the Treasurer wanted to resign, the exceptionally high number of 44 were present out of a total of 120,[21] and on 11 January 1775, when the state of American affairs was taken into consideration, 37 members were present for a discussion in the course of which a motion to petition the House of Commons was defeated by the Master's casting vote.[22] Such figures were abnormally high. At a General Hall on 20 August 1785, only 12 were present, and of these 11 were members of the Standing Committee.[23] On 9 November 1796, only 10 were present, all of them members of the Standing Committee.[24]

Attempts to encourage attendances by imposing fines did not meet with much success. In 1747, for example, the Master complained that members "are very backward in their attendance as well at Publick Halls as on Committees", and insisted that they must send acceptable excuses in writing or be fined,[25] but such appeals met with little success. On a significant number of occasions, there were not enough officers or members present to constitute a quorum.[26] A similar lack of enthusiasm among members was shown by the practice of arriving late and leaving early,[27] and in 1783 the Hall ordered that in future no one might vote unless he had been present at the beginning of the meeting.[28] This slackness and absenteeism is all the more surprising in view of the fact that it was often found at meetings where really important issues were under discussion. Quite often, the exercise of patronage, such as the appointment of a Havenmaster or a Headmaster of Colston's Hospital, produced a bigger attendance than a debate on major issues relating to trade.

The main weight of business in any year must have fallen on the

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apply to the M.P.s to try to obtain the repeal of an Act passed in the last session in favour of the Jews.

[20] *H.B. 8*, 10 Nov. 1758.

[21] *H.B. 10*, 20 April 1773. Membership was then 120, including 22 honorary members.

[22] *H.B. 10*, 11 Jan. 1775. Membership was then 118, including 20 honorary members.

[23] *H.B. 11*, p. 167.

[24] *H.B. 12*, p. 445. The same situation recurred on 10 Dec. 1798 (*H.B. 13*, p. 90).

[25] *H.B. 7*, 30 Sept. 1747.

[26] See, for example, *H.B. 7*, 22 Dec. 1747; 12 Sept. 1750; *H.B. 8*, 27 Feb. 1754; 9 May 1759; *H.B. 9*, 1 Nov. 1764; *H.B. 13*, p. 43.

[27] See, for example, *H.B. 6*, 9 May 1735; 11 Jan. 1742; *H.B. 7*, 10 Dec. 747; *H.B. 8*, 7 July 1762.

[28] *H.B. 11*, p. 50, 28 Oct. 1783.

Master, the two Wardens, the Treasurer and the 10 Assistants, who together formed the Standing Committee. As the Society's activities proliferated, they had much more to do than in the earlier period, and they made considerable use of sub-committees. The reward for their work was no doubt the opportunity to influence policy and to exercise patronage. For those who acted as auditors, there was the attraction of a splendid Audit Dinner.[29] An examination of the members of the Standing Committee suggests that there was a reasonably large turn-over of members each year. Apparently the Society as a whole was content to leave things in their hands, and many members did not bother to attend General Halls unless they were in office.[30]

On a number of occasions in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the Master was re-elected for a second year, but in 1707 the Hall decided that in future no one should be chosen two years in succession.[31] In order to maintain continuity, it was desirable that the Treasurer, who was still an unpaid, part-time officer, should not change too frequently, and although in the first half of the century three Treasurers held office for only one year, the normal term was much longer. Two Treasurers, Christopher Willoughby and Joseph Daltera, span the whole of the period 1751–1800.[32]

Continuity was also provided by the Clerk, whose office became of increasing importance as the Society acquired more and more property in its own right or as a charity trustee. Inevitably, this involved it not only in the ordinary business of property management but in a number of legal disputes. The Clerk's services were also required in connection with parliamentary business and numerous petitions. In 1701 the office was conferred on Henry Fane,[33] and when he died in 1726, it went to his son, Thomas Fane, who was a wealthy lawyer and a customs officer, as well as heir-presumptive to the earldom of Westmorland.[34] He resigned in 1757 to go into Parliament, and the post was then given to his partner, Samuel Worrall.[35] Worrall acquired an interest in a considerable amount of property in Bristol, including some of the Society's land in Clifton. In the nineteenth century, his descendants reaped the full benefit of his investments, and the name Worrall Road commemorates his achievements. In 1786, he quarrelled with the Society when he alleged that the lessees of some property adjoining his own would not have given him trouble "unless they had been supported by somebody. . . ." George Daubeny, whom the cap may have fitted, moved that Mr. Worrall should be asked to state if he meant any member of the Hall. Under pressure, Worrall named Daubeny as the man concerned. He was then asked to produce his evidence at the next Hall. When he failed to do so, he was required to apologise. He refused to do so, and on 7 November 1786 he was dismissed.[36] His successor was another lawyer, Jeremiah Osborne, who was elected on 20 November 1786 and who remained Clerk until his death in April 1798.[37] From 1796, his son John was joint Clerk,[38] and he continued in office after his father's death.

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[29] See p. 113.

[30] It must also be remembered that there was no retiring age and that members once elected did not resign. At any time, a number of people on the roll had probably given up business or were no longer active in Bristol.

[31] *H.B. 3*, 12 Dec. 1707.

[32] For a list of treasurers, see Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 334–5.

[33] Henry Fane was married to Anne, daughter of Thomas Scrope, a Bristol merchant. Her brother, John Scrope, M.P. was Secretary to the Treasury. (Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons 1754–1790*, 1964, Vol. II, Members A–J, pp. 412–13).

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 413; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 229. Thomas Fane sat for Lyme Regis from 1753 to 1762, when he succeeded to the peerage.

[35] Fane's resignation was announced on 16 November 1757, when he was made

The Clerk's official salary remained very small. In 1765, Samuel Worrall pointed out that he was getting only £10 a year, less than the Beadle or the Schoolmaster, even though his work had greatly increased. The Society did not raise the salary, but decided that the Clerk should have an annual honorarium to be fixed at a meeting before the annual elections on 10 December.[39] Worrall was given 30 guineas in the first instance, and later the amount was raised to 50 guineas.[40] The Clerk's job was, of course, only part-time, and he had ample opportunities of getting fees for conveyancing and other legal work which he carried out for the Society. In Worrall's case, there was also the opportunity of obtaining valuable leases. His salary and honorarium were more in the way of a retainer to a lawyer than payment for services rendered.

There was a great increase in the paper work of both the Treasurer

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free of the Society (*H.B. 8*). He had in 1752 asked if his partner, Samuel Worrall, could act as his deputy in view of the likelihood that he would be elected an M.P. (*H.B. 7*, 2 Nov. 1752). Worrall had opened a Stamp Office in Bristol in 1747, and in 1766 he was partner with Tyndale, Hale and Newman in the Exchange Bank (C. H. Cave, *A History of Banking in Bristol*, pp. 11, 85–7; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 230).

[36] *H.B. 11*, pp. 229, 249, 257 (24 May, 11 Sept., 7 Nov. 1786). Latimer's statement (*Merchant Venturers*, p. 230) that he was "summarily dismissed is, to say the least, misleading. If Worrall could not produce the evidence, he should have apologised. For Daubeny, see Lewis Namier and J. Brooke, *The House of Commons 1754–1790*, vol. 2, p. 302. Daubeny had played a leading part in reviving the Tory Steadfast Society and was an M.P. for Bristol 1781–4. In the story election of 1784, in which Daubeny was defeated, Worrall had been one of his opponents (Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 456–7; *Merchant Venturers*, p. 230). In 1786, Daubeny had become one of the partners in the banking firm of Ames, Cave & Co., so there may have been business as well as political rivalry between Worrall and Daubeny.

[37] *H.B. 11*, p. 266.

[38] *H.B. 12*, p. 437.

[39] *H.B. 9*, 21 Oct. 1765.

[40] *H.B. 9*, 21 Oct. 1769.

and the Clerk in the course of the century. Correspondence proliferated, and there was a stream of letters, petitions and memorials of all kinds. Colston's Charity, the Floating Dock, the Seamen's Hospital Fund, and the issue of bearer bonds by the Society involved the keeping of many records. Grants of leases and purchase of property swelled the Society's archives. Before the end of the century, the original rather crude accounting system had to be replaced by something more sophisticated. The Society became increasingly conscious of the importance of its archives and of the need to make them easier for the officials to handle. On 10 September 1736, the *Hall Book* records that "The severall Papers & writings belonging to the Society being brought down to the Hall & deposited there, It is ordered that our Clerk doth take a particular Inventory of the same at the charge of the Hall and place the said papers in proper order, and that a press or Presses be made for that purpose in the Roome over the Committee Roome and that the Standing Committee do take care thereabouts."[41] Later in the century, further action was taken. On 1 November 1765 the Standing Committee viewed the new Repository in which all the records had been placed by the Clerk and ordered that "a table, a branch and labels for distinguishing the contents of the several divisions with Tin'd Plates on the shelves" should be provided.[42]

The records were not, of course, available for inspection by outsiders, and there was some hesitation about allowing them to be seen by ordinary members.[43] Nevertheless, it was desirable that all Merchant Venturers should be familiar with the privileges and obligations of the Society, and in 1741 it was resolved "That the Antient Rules and orders for establishing this Society be fairly entered into a Book to be perused by the Members and for their better Knowledge of the affaires of the Hall."[44]

In order to handle the records easily, it was necessary to have an index to the Books of Proceedings, and in 1754 the Clerk was instructed to carry out the work. The index for 1733–45 was not apparently completed until 1760 when the Clerk was paid at the rate of 2 guineas per year.[45] In 1785, the Clerk was ordered to prepare a schedule of title deeds and evidences.[46]

There was difficulty, about preserving the records intact because some of the officials were inclined to keep them in their own custody instead of in the Hall. When Samuel Worrall was dismissed from the office of Clerk, he made difficulties about handing over the books,[47] and when the Treasurer Jospeh Daltera died, it was necessary to apply to his executors to return his records to the Hall.[48]

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[41] *H.B. 6*, 10 Sept. 1736.

[42] *H.B. 9*, 1 Nov. 1768.

[43] *H.B. 6*, 20 June 1737.

[44] *H.B. 6*, 2 Jan. 1741.

[45] *H.B. 8*, 22 Jan. 1760. It was not apparently kept up-to-date. In 1788, the Clerk laid before the Society the index for 1749–82 (*H.B. 11*, p. 460).

[46] *H.B. 11*, p. 176, 10 Sept. 1785. The earliest surviving schedule of deeds and leases dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The office of Beadle, like that of Clerk, also became of much greater importance in the course of the eighteenth century. It was combined with that of Master of Colston's Hospital, and as the Master received so much per head for each boy, it seems likely that for at least part of the century, he had an opportunity to make a profit for himself. Since the Beadle was Collector of the Society's rents in Clifton and Bristol, he was also in a good position to invest in leasehold property. Samuel Gardiner, senior, served as Beadle until his death in 1740.[49] Then his son Samuel, who had been admitted to the Society in 1727, took over his father's post and held it until his resignation in 1762.[50] The sums handled by the Gardiners were considerable. In 1720, for example, Samuel Gardiner, senior, accounted for £1,070, and in 1729 for over £1,500.[51] Both father and son held from the Society leasehold property in Clifton and Hotwells.[52] Samuel Gardiner, junior, was clearly a rich man who in 1761 agreed to lay out £500 to build a substantial messuage on land in Clifton called the Withy Bed, which he held from the Society.[53]

As far as Samuel Gardiner, junior, was concerned the combination of the office of Beadle with that of Master of Colston's Hospital did not work satisfactorily. Colston's Nominees[54] alleged in 1757 that he had "acquired a very good fortune (chiefly as the Nominees apprehend from the savings he has made out of the allowance for the maintenance of the Boys)". They said that he had purchased "a very handsome Country House about three miles from the School . . . and the School has been totally left to the care of the two Ushers, and even when the Master comes to Town, which is but seldom, he does no part of the duty, sometimes he looks round him and perhaps asks a few questions, but never offers to trouble himself about teaching . . .". The food and clothing in the Hospital were alleged to be bad, and the boys were normally afraid to complain, since "the Ushers have constantly kept close to their Elbows". The Nominees were inclined to remove him, but "as they are not his Paymaster and he being a creature of the above mentioned Society of Merchants who appointed him, they expect great opposition to it".[55] There was from time to time considerable friction between the Society and Colston's Nominees, who had a watching brief on the administration of the Colston Trust, and the allegations may have been exaggerated. Nevertheless, they were not completely groundless. In a Report of the Standing Committee in 1761, Gardiner was severely rebuked for giving the boys the impression that any one who complained would be punished.[56] It is not clear whether this explains Gardiner's resignation in 1762. It may be that he had made enough money to retire. The Society apparently still thought well of him. In 1765, it gave him 50 guineas "for extraordinary services", and he was elected Warden in 1765 and again in 1766, when he died in office.

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[47] *H.B. 11*, p. 269, 25 Nov. 1786; *H.B. 12*, p. 53, 8 June 1790. Worrall's final account was still in dispute as late as 18 Aug. 1791 (*H.B. 12*, p. 146).

[48] *H.B. 13*, p. 179, 7 July 1801.

[49] He had been admitted a member of the Society in 1694 and was elected Beadle by a majority vote in 1697 (McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 33, 64).

[50] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 212; *H.B. 8*, 15 March 1762. On 27 September 1762, William Haynes was appointed in his place (*ibid.*, 27 Sept. 1762).

[51] *H.B. 4*, 5 May 1720 and *H.B. 5*, 14 May 1729.

[52] Merchants' Hall: *Schedule of Deeds*, pp. 265, 267, 272.

[53] *H.B. 8*, 21 Dec. 1761.

[54] See p. 213 ff.

Gardiner was succeeded as Beadle by William Haynes, and when he died in 1785, his place was taken by his son William, who continued to hold the headmastership and the office of Beadle until well into the nineteenth century.[57]

In the course of the century, there were some changes in procedure at Hall meetings. Possibly the increase in numbers in the first part of the period led to difficulties, and in December 1722 the Hall accepted a report from a committee which laid down that certain rules should be read before every General Court. These related to fines for non-attendance and late arrival, and also to the rules for "avoiding of confusion and superfluous speech", for "decent speech in Court" and for "silence in Court". No one in future was to "presume to smoke tobacco in the Hall during the time the Hall sits to do business".[58] In 1783, it was ordered that no member might vote unless present when the names were called and marked,[59] and in 1798 that no one receiving a pension from the Society might vote at meetings.[60] In 1790, the Master was put in his place when he announced that the Hall had been called to consider an address to the King. A motion was carried that this should be postponed as it had not been specified in the summons.[61] What lay behind these things, we do not know because the Hall Books give only the bald facts and there is no revealing journal of the kind that William Claxton compiled in the nineteenth century.

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[55] This is from one of the documents copied out by the nineteenth-century Treasurer, William Claxton, in a volume relating to charities in the Merchants' Hall. There is no title on the cover. This document is headed "Copy of a Case submitted to Mr. Wilbraham 1757" and is a lengthy statement of the case put to a lawyer by Colston's Nominees with comments from Mr. Wilbraham and from the Attorney-General.

[56] *H.B. 8*, 2 April 1761.

[57] *H.B. 8*, 27 Sept. 1762; *H.B. 11*, p. 67, 17 June 1785.

[58] *H.B. 4*, 11 Dec. 1722. The rule about smoking was not repealed until 7 Feb. 1788 (*H.B. 11*, p. 391).

[59] *H.B. 11*, p. 50, 28 Oct. 1783.

[60] *H.B. 13*, p. 45, 30 Jan. 1798.

[61] *H.B. 12*, p. 91, 8 Dec. 1790. 11 members were present. The address was however approved on 11 Dec. 1790 (*ibid.*, p. 94).

The Merchants' Hall, which served as an office and a meeting place for business and social activity, underwent a number of changes, as befitted the increased activity of the Society and its growing dignity. In 1701, the Standing Committee was empowered to alter the Hall on such lines as it thought fit,[62] two dozen chairs were purchased in 1702,[63] and in 1704 all the pictures in the Hall were to be made "of an equall length with Alderman Jacksons".[64] In 1718, the Society decided to make additional rooms, and some adjoining property was purchsaed for this purpose.[65] A new "Great Room" and a "Withdrawing Room" were completed and wainscotted with deal in 1719,[66] and it was decided to pull down some houses to make "a handsome way" at the entrance.[67] Further extensive alterations involving the expenditure of £1,000 and the purchase of property worth £1,200 were carried out between 1720 and 1722. The King Street frontage was apparently rebuilt and ornamental gates and railings were placed at the entrance.[68] The Standing Committee purchased for £8 8s. from Benjamin Snell a brass ship to hand in the lobby.[69]

Other alterations and repairs were made from time to time,[70] and in 1787 the Society carried out extensive work which went on for several years and involved an outlay of £6,000, including £542 for chandeliers and lamps. The architect was Thomas Paty who recased the exterior and gave the Hall the appearance which it retained until its destruction in World War II.[71]

Eighteenth-century Bristol was notably short of buildings in which business meetings and social functions could be held, and the Merchants' Hall must have been much in demand. In 1723 the Society ordered that the new Hall should not be lent in future without further order.[72] The order was repeated in 1735.[73] The Corporation, however, was entitled under the wharfage lease to use it on certain occasions, and later in the century it was frequently lent to the Anchor Society, the Dolphin Society and the Presidents of Bristol, the Gloucestershire and the Somerset Feast, as well as for a number of public meetings, including one to organise petitions against the abolition of the slave trade.[74]

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[62] *H.B. 3*, 7 Feb. 1701.

[63] *H.B. 3*, 12 Aug. 1702.

[64] *H.B. 3*, 11 Jan. 1704.

[65] *H.B. 4*, 11 Nov. 1718.

[66] *H.B. 4*, 4 Sept. 1719.

[67] *H.B. 4*, 29 Oct. 1720.

[68] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 221; *H.B. 4*, 27 April 1721; 11 December 1722.

[69] *H.B. 5*, 23 Nov. 1724.

[70] See, for example, *H.B. 5*, 5 Jan. 1728; *H.B. 6*, 20 July 1738; *H.B. 8*, 2 Sept. 1754; *H.B. 9*, 13 March 1765; *H.B. 10*, 8 Oct. 1777. In 1777, it was decided to purchase additional property around the Hall, including houses valued at over £2,000 (*H.B. 10*, 14 Jan. 1777; 23 June 1777; 25 June 1777; 23 July 1777). In 1791, Mr. Thomas charged 14 guineas for cleaning the pictures (*H.B. 12*, p. 104, 20 Jan. 1791).

[71] *H.B. 11*, pp. 302, 310, 464, 547; *H.B. 12*, pp. 29, 46, 61. For an account of Paty's work, see Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol*, pp. 127 ff.

[72] *H.B. 4*, 27 Sept. 1723.

[73] *H.B. 6*, 20 Oct. 1735.

An issue which seems to have aroused a great deal of controversy was the Annual Dinner on Charter Day. In 1720, the Master and his successors were given permission to invite the wives of members,[75] but a motion that unmarried members might invite lady friends was defeated in 1724, as was a proposal in 1727 that the Master might invite the daughters and sisters of members to supper on the evening of 10 November.[76] In 1730, it was decided that ladies should not be invited to the dinner, but this was reversed in 1731 when the Master was once again authorised to invite wives of members. Members who were widowers or bachelors might invite a lady to supper in the evening, provided she was the sister or daughter of a member.[77] This order was repealed in 1733.[78] In 1744, the Society decided not to hold the annual dinner on 10 November but to have instead a supper and ball on 12 November for such ladies as had usually been invited.[79] There were no festivities in 1745, for Prince Charles had landed in Scotland and the Society had voted £5,000 "for our defence in these times of Publick Danger".[80] In 1746, when the danger had passed, the Society voted for a Ball on 10 November. The Master was to have 20 tickets to distribute to "some County Gentlemen and Ladyes".[81] Balls were also held in 1747 and 1748,[82] but after that dinners, suppers and balls seem to have been dropped by the Society, although on a number of occasions the use of the Hall was granted for balls run by private subscription.[83] An attempt was made to revive the dinner in 1761. Twenty-five members were present and the motion was defeated by the Master's casting vote.[84] There is no evidence to tell us what lay behind these long drawn-out conflicts. It may have been a struggle between the young and the old or between the business men and the fashionable set. In the later years of the century, it could be argued that the Society's financial position did not justify expenditure on frivolous entertainment.

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[74] See p. 137; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 229.

[75] *H.B. 4*, 29 Oct. 1720 (32 members were present out of a total of 109).

[76] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 226; *H.B. 5*, 19 Sept. 1727.

[77] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 226; *H.B. 5*, 14 Oct. 1731.

[78] *H.B. 5*, 4 Oct. 1733. Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 226–7, states that in 1732 the younger members were allowed to be accompanied by the daughters of their senior colleagues.

[79] *H.B. 6*, 8 Oct. 1744.

[80] *H.B. 6*, 10 Oct. and 14 Oct. 1745. Latimer says "Something must have occurred, however, to cause dissatisfaction." He seems to have overlooked Bonnie Prince Charlie.

[81] *H.B. 7*, 28 Oct. 1746.

[82] *H.B. 7*, 30 Sept. 1747; 13 Sept. 1748.

[83] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 227.

[84] *H.B. 8*, 13 Oct. 1761. A proposal to hold a ball was also defeated.

The discontinuance of the Annual Dinner, which was open to all members, seems to correspond with a great increase in the cost of the Audit Dinner for the small group which audited the accounts. This cost about £12 down to 1745, but after that it rose steeply. The bill was £99 in 1759. In 1767 it was £139. Possibly the auditors had gone too far or the Treasurer had learnt wisdom, for after that the item no longer appears in the accounts.[85]

A study of the Society's finances in the eighteenth century raises a number of problems. The results of the annual audit are recorded year by year in the *Hall Books*, but the auditors dealt with a number of different accounts – those of the Treasurer, those relating to Colston's Hospital and Colston's Almshouse, the account of the Collector of Wharfage, and the accounts of the Beadle for the Clifton and Bristol property. The precise relationship between these accounts is not always clear. Moreover, until the financial year 1772–3 the Treasurer appears to have included under Receipts the accumulated capital from earlier years, and there was no separate Stock Account. In 1772–3, there appeared for the first time what was called the Hall's General Account, and in future the profit or loss in the Treasurer's annual account was credited or debited to the General Account. The same procedure was adopted for the Colston Charities, so that henceforth the accounts for Colston's Hospital and Colston's Almshouse appear separately, with the profit or loss transferred to Colston's General Account.[86]

Although the Treasurer's accounts from 1772–3 show his annual receipts and payments, it is not clear whether he made provision for the considerable sums of money which the Society borrowed from time to time or for the capital owing to some of the Charities which the Society administered. When the Society borrowed money, this appears to have been entered under Treasurer's receipts. When he paid back loans, this was shown in his payments. Thus, the income and expenditure figures for any year may give a misleading impression.

An illustration of the kind of problem that arises in considering the Society's finances is found in the General Account for 1795–6 which shows a sudden increase in the stock from £7,939 in the previous year to over £45,000. The explanation appears to be that under the new system of accounting, the estimated value of the

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[85] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 227–8.

[86] *H.B. 10*, 7 Nov. 1774. This audit refers to the year 10 Nov. 1772–10 Nov. 1773, for at this time the auditors were a year behind with the audit.

Society's property was included for the first time in the General Account.[87] There are a number of other problems which require the attention of a qualified accountant. All that can be done here is to give a general picture of the financial position and to draw attention to some particular aspects of the Society's financial policy.

In the first quarter of the century, the Treasurer's expenditure was on average a little under £2,000 a year. In the next quarter, it was nearer £2,400 a year, and in the period 1751–73 it was about £3,600 a year. From 1774 to 1800, it was nearly £6,000 a year, and in 16 out of the 27 years the Treasurer had a deficit on the year's working. Moreover, the position was much worse than it seemed, since the Treasurer's receipts included large sums raised on bonds and by annuities, and these were debts on which interest had to be paid.[88]

When the Hall's General Account begins in 1772–3, the assets were recorded as £10,557 at the beginning of the year, and owing to a loss on the year's working, they had been reduced to £9,482 by the end. They rose and fell in the course of the next 24 years and they stood at £7,939 at the end of 1795. The greater part of the assets recorded in the General Account consisted of a debt due to the Society from Colston Charities' General Account.[89]

At this point, a new accounting system was introduced, and for the first time the Treasurer and his accountants prepared a balance sheet to show the total assets and liabilities, which had not hitherto been recorded. The assets of the Society were valued at £64,135.[90] The largest single item was the wharfage lease, which brought in £1,193 and which was valued, at 16 years purchase, at £19,088. The Docks produced £527 per annum, and were valued at 18 years purchase at £9,846. The Hotwell, let at £543 per annum, was valued at £9,774;[91] fines from the manor of Clifton at £8,860;[92] chief and fee farm rents in Clifton at £4,325;[93] the cranes at £3,872;[94] the manor of Monkton in Stogursey at £2,338;[95] chief and fee farm rents in Bristol at £2,050,[96] rack rents in Clifton at £1,200,[97] and rack rents in Bristol at £1,792.[98] The Merchants' Hall was valued at £1,000 and the Merchants' Almshouse at £300.

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[87] *H.B. 13*, p. 33, 31 Oct. 1797, referring to the financial year 1795–6. The new accounting system was introduced in 1795.

[88] The figures are based on an examination of the annual audits given in the *Hall Books.*

[89] *H.B. 12*, p. 444, 9 Nov. 1796, recording the position at 10 Nov. 1795. £8,211 15s. 5d. was shown as due to the Hall for the Colston Charity Account.

[90] *Treasurer's Journal 1795–1807*, pp. 1 ff.

[91] £543 p.a. at 18 years purchase.

[92] £443 p.a. at 20 years purchase.

[93] £173 p.a. at 25 years purchase.

[94] £242 p.a. at 16 years purchase.

[95] £167 p.a. at 14 years purchase.

[96] £82 p.a. at 25 years purchase.

[97] £75 p.a. at 16 years purchase.

[98] £112 p.a. at 16 years purchase.

The debt due to the Society from Colston's Estate was estimated at £8,211 15s. 3d.

Against these assets, there were considerable liabilities. The Society held in trust a legacy left by William Vick for building a bridge over the Avon, and the capital and interest now amounted to £1,874 7s. 0d. The value of the annuities sold by the Society was £9,810, and payments on these amounted in 1795–6 to £774 12s. £10,000 was owing on the Society's bearer bonds nos. 2–66. £4,260 was owing on bond to the Captains' Society; £2,500 to Edward Daniel; £2,200 to Timothy Powell; £1,000 to the heirs of Edward Daniel; and £3,000 on promissory notes to the Treasurer, Joseph Daltera. In all, liabilities amounted to just over £39,000 as against the estimated value of the assets of £64,135. It might perhaps be regarded as a satisfactory position from the long-term point of view, but on the other hand much of the Society's wealth was tied up in assets which it could not easily dispose of. It was liable to repay on demand or at fairly short notice bonds and promissory notes amounting to nearly £25,000, and it was thus in a very vulnerable position.

Although it is not possible to follow in detail the ramifications of the Society's finances, some consideration must be given to certain items of special interest. For a great part of the century, the Merchant Venturers had to borrow money, often on a considerable scale, in order to meet capital expenditure and short-term commitments. A number of illustrations from the many references in the records will help to show the kind of people from whom the Society borrowed, the interest rates which it paid, and the delicately-balanced financial state in which it often had to live.

Early in 1721, the Master informed the Hall that there was no money in the Treasurer's hands, that the Hall was in his debt, and that a number of bills had to be met, including those for alterations to the Hall. One of the members, William Freke, offered to lend £1,000 for six months on behalf of the Bristol Fire Office, and his offer was accepted.[99] In 1724, £400 was borrowed from the Corporation and £400 from the Fire Office.[100] When the Society bought houses and land in 1730, it raised the money by borrowing £1,000 at 4½ per cent from a Bristol merchant, John Andrews.[101] In the 1740s, it seems to have been borrowing normally at 4 per cent, but Sarah Pope, widow, was willing to accept 3½ per cent in 1742,[102] and in 1746, when the Society had a large debt at 4 per cent it

[99] *H.B. 4*, 4 March 1721. It was decided on 22 July 1722 that the loan should be repaid.

[100] *H.B. 5*, 6 May 1724.

[101] *H.B. 5*, 22 June 1730. For other loans in the 1730s and 1740s see *ibid.*, 11 May 1732, 6 Oct. 1732; *H.B. 6*, 8 Oct. 1734, 26 Nov. 1740, 29 Nov. 1740, 11 Jan. 1742, 9 Dec. 1742, 14 Oct. 1745.

[102] *H.B. 6*, 9 Dec. 1742.

attempted to raise money at 3½ per cent in order to pay it off.[103] The rate seems to have dropped to 3 per cent in the seventeen-fifties and seventeen-sixties.[104] When one of the creditors asked for 4 per cent before he would renew a loan of £1,700 in 1761, it was decided to pay him off. The Clerk, Samuel Worrall, was unsuccessful in an attempt in 1767 to get 3½ per cent for a client who was willing to lend £3,500, and he agreed to settle for 3 per cent.[105] When money was required in 1768, £900 was borrowed from the wealthy Sir Abraham Elton, and it was made up to the required £1,000 by a surprisingly small loan at 3 per cent from John Minty of Clevedon, gardiner.[106]

The purchase and development of Champion's Dock and the building of a new quay at the Grove in the seventeen-seventies had to be financed by a whole series of loans.

In 1770, the Hall authorised the taking up of £4,000, and another £2,000 was required in 1771 and in 1772.[107] And so it continued. Authority was given to raise £3,000 in 1773, £3,000 in 1776, and £3,000 in 1777.[108] Rich widows and spinsters such as Mary Ann Peloquin, Mrs. Hort and Elizabeth Stanfast were ready to oblige.

The trouble was that these short-term loans were liable to be called in by the lenders or by their executors. When the Treasurer knew that Mrs. Peloquin's executors wanted payment of a debt of £3,000 in 1778, he had to draw the attention of the Hall to the difficulty of raising loans at 3 per cent, and he was instructed to see if the Corporation would help.[109] It was embarrassing, too, when Mr. Noble asked for payment of £3,000 in 1778 and 1779,[110] and when Mrs. Blagden asked for repayment of £1,000 unless the Society would pay 4 per cent in May 1780. The Society was compelled to agree to her demand.[111] The situation was getting very difficult, and this was one of the reasons which led the Society to consider raising money by selling annuities.[112]

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[103] *H.B.* 7, 25 Aug. 1746. In 1750, two creditors who had lent £1,500 at 4 per cent were willing to renew at 3½ per cent (*H.B.* 7, 12 Jan. 1750). See also *H.B.* 7, 13 Jan. 1750.

[104] *H.B.* 7, 10 Aug. 1752; *H.B.* 8, 7 Jan. 1753; 16 May 1759.

[105] *H.B.* 9, 4 May 1767, 18 May 1767.

[106] *H.B.* 9, 28 Sept. 1768.

[107] *H.B.* 9, 6 Nov. 1770, 15 Nov. 1770, 8 Oct. 1771, 7 Nov. 1771, 31 Jan. 1772, 8 Oct. 1772, 30 Oct. 1772; *H.B.* 10, 10 Nov. 1772.

[108] *H.B.* 10, 5 June 1773; 5 Feb. 1776, 28 March 1776, 3 Oct. 1776; 26 March 1777, 13 Aug. 1777.

[109] *H.B.* 10, 27 Aug. 1778; 6 May 1779. Mrs. Stanfast's executors also wanted to call in a loan of £800 (*H.B.* 10, 14 March 1778).

[110] *H.B.* 10, 4 Nov. 1778, 6 May 1779.

[111] *H.B.* 10, 31 May 1780, 16 Oct. 1780.

[112] See pp. 120 ff. On 26 Feb. 1780, it was ordered that £5,000 be raised by selling annuities at not above 8 per cent (*H.B.* 10, 26 Feb. 1780).

By the end of 1780, the Treasurer reported to the Hall that he was personally "in advance for the Society of a sum of eighteen hundred pounds" and that "he expects to have an occasion for it soon. . . ." It was ordered that he should be paid when he required the money and that to do this, the Society should borrow at such rate of interest as it could.[113] In 1781 and 1782, the position was very serious. £827 was due to Edward Rosser, mason, for work done at Colston's Almshouse and at the Floating Dock, and he had been forced to borrow money at interest to meet his obligations. Evidently, the Society was not in a position to pay him and instead it agreed to open an interest account for him.[114] When Mrs. Peloquin's executors pressed for 5 per cent on the money owing them from the Society, the Hall was forced to play for time by saying that proper notice had not been given, and that this was usually 12 months and, in any case, not less than 6 months. It offered 3 per cent, rising in stages to 5 per cent, and this was accepted.[115] There was an even more staggering blow in 1782 when John Noble's executors called in a loan of £3,000, and Mrs. Hort's executors asked for repayment of £8,300. The Society had to instruct the Clerk "to endeavour to prevail" with the executors "to let it lye on an higher interest". If he was unable to do so, he was to say the Society required twelve months' notice.[116] It was a hand-to-mouth existence for the unfortunate Treasurer, and the Society tried desperately to meet the crisis by issuing bearer bonds for small amounts at 4 per cent[117] and by treating with creditors to continue their loans at a higher rate of interest.[118] Fortunately, it was still possible to raise new loans. George Fisher, sailmaker, and Samuel Munckley lent £2,000 and £1,500 at 4 per cent to meet debts due to the Treasurer and to a number of tradesmen and to help repay £3,000 to Mr. Noble's executors.[119] Money began to come in from the sale of bearer bonds, and loans, including £1,000 at 4 per cent from Mrs. Ann Goldney in 1786 and £1,700 from the Captains' Society, helped deal with the acute financial crisis.[120] Further deposits were received from the Captains' Society, which seems to have invested its capital with the Merchant Venturers. By 1795–6, it had over £4,000 invested in this way.

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[113] *H.B. 10*, 8 Nov. 1780. On 4 Dec. 1780, the debt to the Treasurer was stated to be £2,000.

[114] *H.B. 10*, 4 Sept. 1781.

[115] *H.B. 10*, 30 Aug. 1781. Richard Llewellyn, brewer, got 5 per cent for a loan of £1,500 in October 1781 (*H.B. 10*, 10 Oct. 1781).

[116] *H.B. 10*, 6 May 1782; 18 Sept. 1782.

[117] For these bearer bonds, see *infra*, pp. 119–20.

[118] *H.B. 10*, 18 Sept. 1782.

[119] *H.B. 11*, p. 16, 12 March 1783; p. 21, 21 March 1783.

[120] *H.B. 11*, p. 62, 7 June 1784; pp. 231, 237, 4 May and 25 May 1786; p. 304, 28 March 1787.

The process of borrowing and then borrowing again to repay lenders continued throughout the century. Mrs. Kingston offered £10,000 in 1792, provided she could have 3½ per cent, and this was accepted on condition that she agreed to give six months' notice, but she then changed her mind.[121] The Society was offering 3½ per cent up to £9,000 in September 1792, and four individuals agreed to lend between them £4,700.[122] Interest rates rose with the coming of war early in 1793, and by October 1794 Timothy Powell wanted 4½ per cent to continue his loan.[123] The war did not go well, and the money market became even more difficult. In June 1796, the Master and wardens had to give their personal notes to the Treasurer for £1,700 needed to discharge £2,200 due to the representatives of the late Timothy Powell, and the Treasurer was instructed to raise money as he thought fit.[124] The rate of interest went up, and the Clerk was authorised to accept any sums offered at 5 per cent to discharge money due to the Treasurer and the Master and Wardens on their notes.[125] Things were clearly in a bad way with the Society in 1797 when on 15 March the Clerk had to be instructed to raise £500 or £1,000 at 5 per cent in order to pay the pensioners and others to whom the Society had obligations on 25 March.[126] The war was going very badly, and it was necessary to instruct a committee to wait on Messrs. Ames, Cave and Co. and Tyndall, Elton and Co. to tell them that the Society would be obliged if they would permit money due on the Society's notes to remain unpaid for the present. They agreed to hold off for three months.[127] Dean, Whitehead and Co. helped the Society out with a loan of £2,000, and the Clerk was instructed to approach Sir John Hugh Smythe and Dr. Thomas Smythe for a loan of between £4,000 and £5,000 at 5 per cent for five or six years.[128] There was a masterly understatement in the Treasurer's letter to the Master in which he said he had failed to persuade Tyndall, Elton and Co. to renew for a month or more two promissory notes of £1,000. He suggested that the Committee should consider how to meet them "for should the Matter get to the Knowledge of the Bond Holders, it might be hurtful to the credit of the Society".[129] Fortunately for the Society, lenders were always forthcoming, and loans such as £1,000 from Mr. Goldney for 5 or 6 years at 5 per cent in 1798, and £2,600 from two clients of the Clerk,

[121] *H.B. 12*, p. 182, 7 Jan. 1792; p. 187, 24 Jan. 1792.
[122] *H.B. 12*, p. 218, 12 Sept. 1792; p. 224, 10 Oct. 1792.
[123] *H.B. 12*, p. 342, 4 Oct. 1794; p. 377, 30 March 1795; p. 418, 17 Nov. 1795.
[124] *H.B. 12*, p. 440, 25 June 1796.
[125] *H.B. 12*, p. 443, 4 Oct. 1796.
[126] *H.B. 13*, p. 11, 15 March 1797.
[127] *H.B. 13*, pp. 25, 27, 10 June and 23 Sept. 1797.
[128] *H.B. 13*, p. 28, 26 Sept. 1797.
[129] *Treasurer's Letter Book 2*, 1788–1803, p. 42.

William Turner of Wraxhall and Rachel Plaister of Flax Bourton, in 1799, enabled the Treasurer to keep his head above water.[130] Nevertheless, one can understand the feelings of the 17 Merchant Venturers present at a Hall meeting on 23 February 1798, who resolved "that at this present important Crisis, when our Commerce, prosperity and very Existence as a Nation are at stake, it is the duty of every one partaking of the blessings of the Constitution and particularly a Society comprised of Members enjoying the privileges of English Merchants to stand forward and exert their utmost power to defeat the destructive designs of our Enemies and to defend the Kingdom", but who nevertheless had to add "That the Society regrets from the lowness of the Finances, it will not be in their power to come forward to the Extent of their Wishes." All that they could contribute to the Voluntary Subscription for the Defence of the Kingdom was £600.[131]

To meet the desperate need for liquid capital in the last two decades of the century, the Society was compelled to devise new methods of raising money. It had long been accustomed to raise large loans on the security of its bonds, but towards the end of 1782 it had to adopt the expedient of accepting small sums in return for bonds payable to the bearer on thirty days' notice on which it paid 4 per cent interest. It hoped to raise a large sum in this way and advertised in the Bristol newspapers for sums of not less than £100.[132] By March 1783, the Treasurer was able to report that £2,225 had been raised from 11 individuals.[133] A special book was made containing bonds and counterfoils, and as the loans came in, the amount was filled in on the bond itself and on the counterfoil in the book.[134] The first bond in the book was issued to George Fisher, sailmaker, for £2,000 on 2 October 1782, but this was entered here in error, and there is a note "not made payable to Bearer being issued before this form was settled". The first bearer bond proper, No. 2, was issued to William Brewer on 6 November 1782 and was for £100. The cancelled bond has been preserved. It was not redeemed until 1818. On each bond, the Clerk recorded the quarterly payments of interest and any changes in the interest rate, as well as the date of redemption. Most of the first 99 bonds were for £100, but there was one for £600, 8 for £500, one for £350, six for £300, one for £250, one for £225, six for £200, one for £175 and four for £150. The scheme had the advantage of raising a large sum of money, and in March 1792, bonds to the value of £15,350 were current at 4 per cent interest.[135] Lenders were then asked to accept 3 per cent, but the rate had to be raised to 4 per cent at the beginning of the war in 1793.[136] Obviously the Society would have been very vulnerable if there had been a financial panic among small lenders and if the solvency of the Society had been in question. In fact, the Society's credit was very good, and many of the bonds were held for long periods. Over half of the first hundred, which were issued between 1782 and 1798, were still current in 1838, even after a big redemption in that year.[137]

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[130] *H.B. 13*, p. 69, 17 July 1798; pp. 104, 108, 1 Aug. and 4 Sept. 1799.

[131] *H.B. 13*, p. 52, 23 Feb. 1798.

[132] *H.B. 10*, 18 Sept. 1782.

[133] *H.B. 11*, p. 12, 12 March 1783.

[134] The Book of Counterfoils for bonds nos. 1–99 from 1782 to February 1798 is preserved in the Society's archives, together with various bundles of bonds which were cancelled when they were redeemed.

Another means of raising money in the financial difficulties of the later eighteenth century was the sale of annuities. The first time the Society went into the annuity business seems to have been in 1778 when Captain Edward May offered £800 for an annuity of £56 per annum for himself and his wife. He was 58 and she was 65.[138] In 1780, the Society decided to try to raise £5,000 by selling annuities at a maximum rate of 8 per cent.[139] When Samuel Worrall made an enquiry on behalf of a client who wanted an annuity for a woman of 50 and a child of 8, he was offered 7 per cent for the child and 8 per cent for the woman. His client was a Mrs. Wilson, who had inherited £700 under the will of Mrs. Hammond, to whom the Society owed £2,000. Worrall was instructed to tell the lady about the scheme and to encourage her to come in by informing her that the executors of Mrs. Hammond must give regular notice to the Society for repayment of the debt and that they had not yet done so.[140] Annuities did not at first sell very briskly, and it is yet another comment on the Society's desperate need for money that it instructed the Clerk to try for any sums over £100.[141] When Lord Templeton offered £4,000 for an annuity of £300 a year on a gentleman aged 68 who was in good health and his wife aged 57–8 who was very infirm, the Society was happy to accept.[142]

Annuities, unlike bonds, had the advantage that the money could not be called in. They provided immediate capital, and since the rates were based on various tables then current, they ought not to have involved any loss in the long run, provided business was on a reasonably large scale. Whether the Society did in fact make a profit cannot be ascertained without a detailed study of all the annuities. It made a considerable loss, for example, on an annuity of £35 per annum bought for £500 on behalf of Mrs. Mariana Irwin in 1780. She was then aged 28 and she lived until 1831.[143] Not only did she live too long, but she also made life very difficult for a succession of treasurers by residing in France, by refusing to use the name of the husband from whom she was separated and by complaining bitterly when the Treasurer deducted income tax at source for her annuity or "miserable pittance". In a series of letters over the years, she mingled her complaints with personal comments, informing the Treasurer that she had married against her brother's wishes a man "who never merited a woman like me", that her husband had died overwhelmed with debt, and that his mistress Lydia Hackshaw (or Alexander) was also dead. In 1811, she told the Treasurer that she was "in good health, though some years more than fifty (although I do not appear forty)". Eight years later, she wrote "I am now in years struck into the vale as says Othelo, 'yet thats not much', for thank God, I enjoy as good health as at the age of twenty. . . ." Sometimes patiently, sometimes with exasperation, the treasurers explained to her that they must have an annual certificate from a minister or magistrate to prove that she was still alive, "in which you think them very singular to require it but it is what, if I am rightly informed, Public Bodys in France that grant Annuities expect. . . ." In 1804, the Treasurer told her sharply "unless you draw on me as Treasurer to the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol, not Bankers as you describe them in your last Bill . . . and sign your name Mariana Irwin, your Bill will positively be returned unpaid". She was told that she must be aware that on her decease her executors could have no claim to the sum of £500 which was paid for the annuity, as the late Treasurer had pointed out in letters of November 1797, April 1798 and May 1799. The deductions for property tax, she was informed again and again, were laid on by *the Government of this Kingdom*, not by the Society. On another occasion, the Treasurer complained that her certificates were "drawn up in such a very improper manner that it was with the greatest difficulty I prevailed on the Collector of the Property Tax here to take them. . . ." She would not or could not understand all this fuss about legal niceties. The Treasurer knew her handwriting and style very well – "do you think I would write you posthumous *bills* and letters? . . . Mariana Irwin or Mariana Smith is *one* and the *same* person, of which truth you are well convinced". As for the property tax, it was "a crying injustice", and in 1814 she wrote optimistically "I hope the Gentlemen Venturers at Bristol will consider the peace is now made and make no more deductions but for postage. . . ." One hopes that when the Treasurer wrote to Messrs Stride & Co. of Copthall Court asking for the death certificate of Mrs. Mariana Irwin of St. Vincent's, he experienced at least a twinge of regret at the passing of this spirited, humorous and troublesome annuitant.

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[135] *H.B. 12*, p. 191, 20 March 1792.

[136] *H.B. 12*, p. 263, 19 Feb. 1793. In the crisis of 1797, the Society considered whether it ought not to increase the rate still more (*H.B. 13*, p. 21, 6 June 1797).

[137] Details in this paragraph are based on an examination of the bundles of cancelled bonds in the Society's archives.

[138] *H.B. 10*, 17 Aug. 1778.

[139] *H.B. 10*, 26 Feb. 1780.

[140] *H.B. 10*, 13 March 1780.

[141] *H.B.* 10, 31 May 1780.

[142] *H.B. 10*, 20 July 1780.

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[143] *H.B. 10*, 26 Aug. 1780; *Treasurer's Letter Book 5*, 1819–34, 26 April 1831. For the correspondence between her and the Treasurers, see *Treasurer's Letter Book 2*, 1788–1803, pp. 67–8; *Treasurer's Letter Book 3*, pp. 8–9, 26, 32, 43; *Treasurer's Letter Book 4*, 1809–14, pp. 3, 28; *Bundles of Letters*, nos. 33, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, and Bundle marked "Sundries".

Annuities may have involved some risk and they could produce trouble, but for an organisation which was short of ready money, they had great advantages. In the financial year 1795–6, the Society was paying out interest of £744 12s. on annuities of £9,810.[144] Further sales in the following decade brought the annual interest payable by the Society up to £938 18s.[145]

One other very interesting aspect of the Society's finances in the eighteenth century was the considerable deficit arising in connection with the Colston Charities. Although at the beginning of the century the Society had accepted as adequate the estates which Edward Colston gave it in trust for his almshouse on St. Michael's Hill and his hospital for 100 boys on St. Augustine's Back, the income in fact proved inadequate, quite apart from the difficulties which the Society had in obtaining part of the legacy from Colston's heirs.[146] The Charity's debt to the Society mounted steadily. It was about £1,450 by 1712, it was over £3,000 by 1718, and it passed the £4,000 mark by 1728. It was over £8,000 in 1745, over £9,000 by 1754 and over £12,000 by 1762. It remained at that level for most of the seventeen-sixties and then began to fall. When the first General Account for the Hospital was put before the Society in 1774, the Hospital was in debt to the Society for £9,318 14s. 6d. The total indebtedness of the Hospital and the Almhouse to the Hall remained about that level until 1780, after which it rose, reaching a peak of £11,274 10s. 4½d. at the audit of 31 October 1786. Thereafter, it fell until it was down to £7,289 in 1800 and £6,463 in 1805.[147]

It may seem surprising that the Society allowed the Colston Charity to run into debt to itself on this scale. It kept a record of the debt from year to year, but it did not charge interest on it, and it did not try to recover the debt by reducing the number of boys in the Hospital. Its motives were probably mixed. No doubt it was genuinely anxious to maintain the educational and charitable activities which Colston had established. It probably did not want to become involved in the difficulties which would arise with

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[144] *Treasurer's Journal, 1795–1807*, Balance Sheet 1795–6.

[145] *Ibid.*, Balance Sheet, 1805–6.

[146] For further details about the Charity, see pp. 209ff.

[147] Based on an examination of the accounts in the *Hall Books* and in *Treasurer's Journal 1795–1807*.

Colston's Nominees if it tried to alter the original arrangement. There would, too, have been a public loss of face and a lot of questioning if it had tried to alter the original foundation. Moreover, from 1785 onwards the income from the estates was rising and the debt was being reduced year by year. Finally, the loss was not quite as large as appeared, for the Society had entered into an arrangement by which it had disposed of some of the lands left by Colston and acquired instead an interest in the manor of Monkton Holme in Stogursey. It came to regard this as its own manor. In the account for 1794–5 the income from Stogursey was £167 per annum, and the capital value at 14 years purchase was £2,338. The Society may well have felt that it was best to leave things as they were and wait until rising income from the Colston estates wiped out the debt. It would then not only have recovered its losses on the Hospital but also be the happy possessor of a valuable manor in Stogursey. It was to have a very nasty shock in the nineteenth century when its claim to Stogursey was successfully challenged in the courts.[148]

Finally, it must be remembered that although the Society in the eighteenth century was often in difficulties about ready money, it valued its assets at the end of the period at over £64,000 against liabilities of £39,000. Its financial problems arose to a considerable extent from the fact that it was busy acquiring property both in Bristol and outside. In the long term, its investments were to pay handsome dividends.

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[148] See pp. 365–70.

CHAPTER 8

Overseas Trade in the Eighteenth Century

THE main lines on which the Society developed in the eighteenth century had already been laid down in the seventeenth century. There were new problems as well as old ones, and the emphasis put on the different aspects of its work changed from time to time, but the overriding concern of the Society was still that of furthering the interests of its own members and of the merchants in general. Problems such as the relations between England and the restless American colonies, the demands of Ireland for greater economic independence or the movement to abolish the slave trade were seen primarily from the point of view of how they affected the interests of Bristol. Even matters relating to national security were considered in terms of local interests. An embargo on shipping, for example, or the pressing of men for the navy in time of war might have unfortunate consequences for the merchants.

Foreign trade was naturally the prime interest of the Society, and here above all it was concerned first and foremost with the interests of Bristol. It is easy to condemn such an attitude as narrow and selfish, but it must be remembered that it was common to all such pressure groups in the eighteenth century. The merchants did not see themselves as selfish but as public-spirited defenders of an economic system which benefited the country as a whole. The philosophy of the Society was summed up in its reactions to a proposal in 1778 to open the ports of Ireland to colonial produce. It was all very well for Edmund Burke, M.P. for Bristol, to take a broad view of the matter and to consider it from the point of view of the Empire as a whole, for Burke was not himself engaged in commerce. A society which existed to press the interests of Bristol by every possible means and which believed that what it wanted was good for England reacted, as might have been expected, by claiming that the proposal "will prove destructive to that great system of Commerce, Manufactures and Revenue which ever since the establishment of the colonies has been successfully pursued", and it added, for full measure, that it would also be "Injurious to the landed Interests of this Kingdom, and that it would be most unjust and unequal to grant such Priviledges to Ireland, not paying the same Taxes, nor being subject to the same Dutys as the People of this Country".[1]

The Society, which had long abandoned any hope of being a monopoly itself, was also determined that the trade of the country should not be monopolised by others. The battle for freer trade had met with only partial success in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth century some old enemies still remained and new ones emerged to engage the Society's attention.

As in the seventeenth century, the Society was often involved on more than one front at the same time, but again, it is convenient to examine separately the different fields of activity. It must be remembered that the amount of attention which the Society gave to any particular issue was not necessarily commensurate with the importance of that issue in the total commercial economy of Bristol. Even a fairly small threat might call for a great deal of attention.

The trade with Europe engaged a high proportion of Bristol shipping throughout the eighteenth century, even though it did not impress contemporaries nearly as much as the more spectacular West India trade. In 1764, for example, out of 343 ships clearing the port, 85 went to Europe, as compared with 53 to the West Indies, 52 to North America and 32 to Africa.[2] But in spite of its importance, the trade with Europe does not figure at all prominently in the Society's records, apart from the problem of protecting shipping when England was at war.[3] No great controversial issues arose over the control of the trade, since the Eastland Company had for all practical purposes ceased to exist, and in 1699 the entry fee to the Russia Company had been reduced to £5 and membership was no longer restricted to wholesale merchants.[4] Bristolians were not, in any case, very concerned with the activities of the Russia Company. There was a flicker of interest in 1740 when the Standing Committee was asked to consider the implications of a petition from the Russia Company to allow raw silk and other produce of Persia to be imported from Russia, but no further action was taken.[5] The only issues of any significance in which the Society was involved concerned Mediterranean passes and quarantine regulations.

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[1] *H.B. 10*, 15 April 1778.

[2] In 1790, clearances for Europe were 88 out of a total of 420. 65 ships went to the West Indies, 48 to North America and 25 to Africa. For details of ships entering and clearing the port from 1764 to 1796, see Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, p. 181.

[3] For convoys and embargoes on trade in wartime, see pp. 170–4. The trouble with Spain in the first half of the century related primarily to colonial trade. See pp. 139, 170, 238.

[4] E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, ii, 325–6, 333.

[5] *H.B. 6*, 29 Nov. 1740. The dispute was between the Russia Company and the Levant Company and was not really of concern to Bristol. E. Lipson, *op. cit.*, ii, 349.

Mediterranean passes were issued by the Admiralty to British ships as a result of agreements with some of the Barbary states of North Africa, and they entitled the holder to pass without being molested by the ships of those states. They were very necessary for ships trading to Spain, Italy and the Mediterranean. The complaint of English merchants concerned excessive fees taken by Admiralty officials and other abuses. In 1721 the Society ordered the preparation of a petition to the King against excessive fees, and in 1724 a committee was set up to enquire into abuses, including frequent demands to renew the passes. Finally, in 1730, as a result of petitions from London and the outports, a Committee of the Privy Council examined complaints and ordered that steps should be taken to prevent malpractice, to improve procedure, to regulate fees and to put the outports on an equal footing with London.[6]

The quarantine regulations gave even more trouble. On 22 November 1720, an Order of Council was read to the Hall regarding the opening, airing and repacking of goods after performance of quarantine.[7] The Order was considered very inconvenient for the ships concerned, which were laden with currants, raisins and other heavy goods which had not come from infected areas. There was no convenient place for landing goods near the place where quarantine was performed, and no houses in which to store them. It was decided to petition the King for permission to discharge "ponderous goods" without airing and to ask Mr. Nathaniel Wraxall to take the petition to London. The petition pointed out that the river of Bristol was "attended with a great flux of water", that the ground near the quarantine place was "soft and owsey", so that the goods could not be left there. Some of the goods involved had been laden in ports far distant from any infected place. The Society asked that the goods might instead be aired in lighters after quarantine had been performed. In December, Mr. Wraxall was urged to do his best to get more satisfactory arrangements and a second petition was sent.[8]

Quarantine was again under discussion in 1763 when the Society was informed that London and Liverpool were taking steps to get it taken off ships from Spain and the Mediterranean. The Standing Committee agreed to pay 30 guineas towards the cost. Three years later, there was a long discussion about the quarantine at Leghorn and the damage it was doing to trade. It was urged that there was no longer any danger, and the Master took the matter up with one of the city's M.P.s, Robert Nugent. Nugent referred it to the Board of Trade, and advised the Society to send a Memorial, as Liverpool had done. A petition was duly sent, and Nugent was able to report at the end of November that quarantine had been removed.[9]

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[6] For Mediterranean passes, see Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, p. 112; *Port and Politics*, pp. 11–12, 13, 31–4; *H.B. 4*, 4 March 1721; 15 May 1721; *H.B. 5*, 23 Dec. 1724; *Book of Charters 2*, 269 ff.

[7] The airing of the goods was considered to be a further precaution against the spread of infection.

[8] *H.B. 4*, 22 Nov. 1720; 23 Nov. 1720; 2 Dec. 1720; 15 May 1721. *Book of Charters 2*, 213, 215, 217; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 10–11.

The European trades, then, gave very little cause for concern to the Society in the eighteenth century, and this was also true of the Irish trade until the later part of the period. The Irish trade was important and normally employed more ships than any other trade.[10] Although their tonnage and the value of their cargoes were much smaller than in the West India trade, the dairy produce and raw materials which they brought to Bristol and the colonial produce which they took back provided a solid foundation for commerce in more exotic goods further afield. The industrial and the commercial development of Ireland was regulated by the British Government in the interests of England, and the attitude of Bristolians in general, and of the Society in particular, was quite clear. They were opposed to any measures which would encourage competition from Irish commerce or Irish industry. Their attitude was summed up in the instructions which the Standing Committee gave to Robert Nugent in 1765 to oppose "totally and with all his might" proposals to lower the Irish customs duties, since these showed, they alleged, "the great design of the Irish . . . to cramp the Export Trade of England as well as of its produce and thereby (to) encourage the Culture and manufacture of Ireland. . . ."[11] Above all, there must not be direct trade between Ireland and the colonies, for this would damage the merchants of Bristol in their role as middlemen.[12]

The Irish question did not give the Society a great deal of concern until the later seventeen-seventies, for until then Ireland was not in a position to exercise much pressure on the Government. Its occasional attempts to assert itself were promptly resisted. When in 1704 the Irish Parliament asked that Irish linen might be sent direct to the colonies, the Master was instructed to write to the Bristol M.P.s asking them to oppose the plan.[13] Similar resistance was offered in 1731 and 1733 to proposals that sugar might be sent to Ireland direct from the plantations instead of through England.[14] In 1752, the Society petitioned unsuccessfully against a bill to allow the import of Irish coarse cloth yarn into the port of Yarmouth.[15] On the other hand, it was in favour of relaxing in time of scarcity leglislation prohibiting the import of Irish meat and butter. It was in its interest that food prices in England should not be excessively high.[16]

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[9] *H.B. 9*, 20 Oct. 1763; 13 Dec. 1763; 27 May 1766; *Book of Petitions*, p. 14, 22 June 1766; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 10–11, 107–8.

[10] In 1764, 107 ships out of a total of 343 cleared Bristol for Ireland. In 1790, the figure was 169 out of 420. Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, p. 181.

[11] *H.B. 9*, 23 Dec. 1765, concerning a proposed new Irish Book of Rates. These would have placed restrictive duties on manufactured goods imported into Ireland and have taken off duties on raw materials. They were "a further proof of the design of the Irish" to encourage their own manufactures.

[12] *Supra*, pp. 128–9.

[13] *H.B. 3*, 11 Jan. 1704.

In the later seventeen-seventies a really serious crisis emerged as far as Bristol was concerned, and it produced a flurry of activity on the part of the Society. A more liberal attitude towards Ireland was developing in many quarters in the later eighteenth century. It was found even in the M.P.s for Bristol, Jarritt Smith, Robert Nugent, and, above all, Edmund Burke. The warning given by the revolt of the American colonies and the emergence of the Irish Volunteers during the war helped to convince the Government that something must be done for Ireland. The Volunteers had come into existence for the purpose of national defence, but they might easily turn against England if economic concessions were not made. When Lord North's government proposed in 1778 to make concessions, the Society went into action with tremendous vigour. As Dr. Underdown puts it, "Not since the Stamp Act had it moved with such alacrity and thoroughness: open meetings, petitions and deputations to Parliament from the Society and the Common Council, approaches to other M.P.s, circular letters to every city and borough in the kingdom, correspondence in the Bristol press – the whole apparatus of opposition was deployed." It is not possible to study every detail of the bitter controversy which ensued, but some features of it may be noted.[17]

On 13 April 1778 the Society wrote to the M.P.s, Burke and Cruger, informing them that the city intended to oppose the measure with all its power, and added with regret "we are sorry that we are likely to be deprived of so able an advocate as Mr. Burke".[18] In another letter of the same date to Richard Comb, the Society went so far as to say "It strikes us at present that it would be better for this Kingdom that a Union should take place rather than this very prejudicial Measure. . . ."[19] It rejected uncompromisingly the plea which Burke had made in a letter of 9 April in which he argued "Our late misfortunes have taught us the danger and mischief of a restrictive, coercive, and partial policy". Burke argued that "The world . . . is large enough for us all, and we are not to conclude that what is gained to one part is lost, of course, to the others. . . ." One suspects that Burke was expressing a pious hope when he added "These opinions, I am satisfied, will be relished by the clear understandings of the merchants of Bristol, who will discern that a great Empire cannot at this time be supported upon a narrow and restrictive scheme either of commerce or government."[20]

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[14] *H.B. 5*, 11 Dec. 1730; *H.B. 6*, 5 March 1734. Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 35; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 192. In 1734, the Hall paid £10 towards the charges of West India merchants in London in obtaining an Act concerning the import of sugar.

[15] *H.B. 8*, 26 Feb. 1752.

[16] There was a good deal of correspondence with the M.P.s Jarritt Smith and Robert Nugent on this subject in the 1760s, and petitions were sent to Parliament in 1761 and 1765. See *H.B. 8*, 26 Nov. 1761; 30 Nov. 1761; *H.B. 9*, 16 Jan. 1764; 20 June 1764; 14 Jan. 1765; *Letters*, Bdle. 7, from Jarritt Smith, 23 Nov. 1761; Bdle. 8, from Nugent, 11 April 1763; Bdle. 9, 12 Dec. 1764. The petitions are printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 94, 99.

[17] P. T. Underdown, *Bristol and Burke*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1961, p. 15. There is a good deal of material about this dispute in the Society's records, including a bundle marked "Letters relating to the opening of the Ports of Ireland in 1778", and there are many letters in the bundles of letters preserved in the Hall, including a number to and from Edmund Burke. Some of these are printed in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, edit. G. H. Guttridge, Cambridge, 1961, vols. III and IV. See also the Society's *Letter Book 1747–1780*.

On 15 April 1778, the Hall approved a strong resolution against opening the Irish ports and decided to write to Liverpool and to send a petition form to every city and borough in the kingdom.[21] The Merchant Venturers justified their position in a letter to Burke on 30 April in which they said they did not wish to oppress Ireland, and they could not believe the advocates of the measure were acting on principle when they considered what great benefits would obviously accrue to the great landed proprietors in Ireland. They added tartly that "it will certainly have a very odd appearance and perhaps some improper weight against the interests of this City as well as the Kingdom at large that the Representative of Bristol should be an advocate for the Bill". They hoped Burke would make it plain that he spoke for himself and not for his constituents.[22] Burke stood his ground and replied "you may be assured that nothing could give me a more sincere pleasure than to obey the commands of the Society when I am not morally certain that I should do them a serious injury by my compliance with their wishes". He denied that the legislation was being put forward by Irish landed interests, and he said that even if this were so, it would not necessarily be wrong. He knew that by differing from the Society he was endangering his political future as M.P. for Bristol, and, he added, "With regard to my opinions, I may be wrong in them; but be sure that my errour arises neither from ill will or obstinacy, or a want of the highest regard for the sentiments of those from whom I have the misfortune to differ. . . ."[23]

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[18] *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 13 April 1778.

[19] *Ibid.*, 13 April 1778.

[20] See Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 195–6 for a transcript.

[21] *H.B. 10*, 15 April 1778. In the bundle marked "Letters relating to the opening of the Ports of Ireland in 1778", there is a copy of a printed invitation, dated 13 April, by a committee of the Society inviting merchants and traders to a meeting "to pursue such Measures as shall appear best to arrest so great an evil".

[22] *Letter Book 1774–1780*, Samuel Span to Burke, 30 April 1778.

The battle continued into 1779. In January and February Bristol was in touch with the Committee of Trade in Blackburn and with the Liverpool merchants.[24] There were clear signs that Ireland might go the way of the American colonies and take up arms, and in October 1779 the Irish Parliament carried without division a motion "that it is not by temporary Expedients but by a Free Trade alone that this Nation is now to be saved from impending Ruin". As late as 26 June 1779 dissatisfaction with the Government among members of the Society showed itself in a motion in the Hall asking the King "to entrust the direction of National affairs to such persons as are possessed of Wisdom and Fidelity adequate to so important a charge". It was, however, defeated and a Loyal Address was carried by 16 votes to 10.[25] In December the Government agreed to make major concessions to Ireland. Lord North put forward his proposals on 13 December 1779, and the Hall was informed by letters from Burke, Cruger and Comb of what was about to happen.[26] The Society gracefully accepted the inevitable and decided not to object to the proposals, although in response to a petition from the sugar refiners of Bristol about proposed duties on sugar, it did agree to petition the Treasury.[27]

On this occasion, the Society had been defeated, but it was more successful in opposing the even more generous treatment of the Irish economy which Pitt proposed in 1785. The Hall considered on 11 March 1785 proposals put forward by the Irish House of Commons to the Government and decided to petition the House of Commons to be heard against them.[28] It also joined the Association at the London Tavern which was organising resistance and added its own representative to the one or two representatives from Bristol who were being sent to London by "the Petitioners at large in the City". The Merchant Venturers whipped up support among Bristol manufacturers and West India merchants, and they again petitioned Parliament in May 1785.[29] In the end, Pitt's enlightened commerical policy on

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[23] The letter is quoted at length in Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 196–7.

[24] *Letters*, bdle. 22, 12 Jan. 1779, 22 Feb. 1779.

[25] *H.B. 10*, 26 June 1779. Dissatisfaction did not arise simply from the Irish proposals but from the disastrous way in which the war was being conducted.

[26] *H.B. 10*, 6 Dec. 1779 and 21 Dec. 1779. On the last occasion, only 9 members were present, all of them members of the Standing Committee.

[27] *H.B. 10*, 26 and 28 Feb. 1780. The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 149–50.

[28] *H.B. 11*, p. 117, 11 March 1785. The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 153–5.

[29] *H.B. 11*, p. 128, 26 March 1785. Only 12 members were present. The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 156–7.

Ireland was destroyed by determined opposition in which the Society of Merchant Venturers had played its part.

The Irish trade occupied the attention of the Society during only part of the eighteenth century, but the African trade gave it concern throughout the period. The volume of trade was not in fact so great as has sometimes been suggested, and there were considerable fluctuations,[30] but major issues of principle were involved. The two main questions were whether the trade should be organised under a monopolistic company and whether the slave trade should be controlled, or even abolished. There were numerous side-issues, such as the amount of money that should be spent by the Government on the African forts, the need for adequate protection in time of war, and illegal trading by captains in the Royal Navy. With reference to the African trade in general, and the slave trade in particular, Professor Minchinton expressed the view that "More petitions were drafted, more letters were exchanged, more deputations were sent on this subject than on any other issue."[31] Africa generated an immense amount of heat, for the interests of Bristolians were often in conflict with those of other powerful groups in London and elsewhere. The total amount of paper work which resulted may easily give a misleading impression of the importance of the African trade in the economy of Bristol.

The basic issue in the first half of the century was whether the trade should remain relatively free or whether the Royal Africa Company should once again be allowed to have a monopoly.[32] The Act of 1698, in the securing of which the Merchant Venturers had played their part, opened the trade on certain conditions to those who were not members of the Company, but the Company worked hard to recover its lost privileges,[33] and from time to time the Society had to go into battle once again. Thus, in January 1709, the Hall was informed by Robert Yate, one of the Bristol M.P.s, that the Africa Company intended to monopolise the trade. He urged the Hall to make any interest it could against the proposed bill. In September, £40 16s. 5d. was spent on sending a representative to London for this purpose.[34] The matter continued to trouble the

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[30] See Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, p. 181; *The Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 4.

[31] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. xxvi.

[32] For the activities of the Company, see K. G. Davies, *The Royal Africa Company*, 1957.

[33] For the long drawn-out parliamentary struggle, see Davies, *op. cit.*, pp. 135 ff.

[34] *H.B. 4*, 4 Jan. 1709, 13 Sept. 1709. Bristol was not, of course, fighting alone. It was aligned with individual traders, with Virginia, Maryland and Jamaica, and with representatives from Liverpool, Birmingham and other towns. K. G. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

Society in 1711, 1712 and 1713.[35] The issue came alive again in 1719 when two members were voted money to go to London, and in 1720 the Master expressed his fear that a monopoly was going to be attempted. At the end of the year, the Society was considering preparing a petition.[36] There was another alarm in 1724, when the Standing Committee was authorised if necessary to send three representatives to London.[37] The Corporation was also very interested and did in fact appoint the committee which went to London, but the Society paid part of the cost and also made appropriate gifts to the Bristol M.P.s and to Alderman Elton, a Merchant Venturer who sat for Taunton.[38] The struggle continued, and at the end of 1725 the Master had to inform the Hall of yet another scheme to regulate the trade. The Society and the Corporation jointly opposed the plan, and the Society paid half the cost.[39] In 1729–30, the Royal Africa Company was again menacing, and the South Sea Company also attempted to get involved in the trade. This produced another flurry of activity on the part of the Society in conjunction with the Corporation, the London merchants and the merchants of Liverpool.[40]

Then there was a lull until 1744 when the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations asked the Mayor to obtain the views of the principal traders about the African trade. The Mayor forwarded the letter to the Society, and the Standing Committee prepared an answer. It said that about 40 Bristol ships a year were engaged in the trade, that the forts were badly kept by the Royal Africa Company and were no use to traders, that the Government grant of £20,000 a year was misued, and that Royal Navy ships would protect the trade much more effectively.[41]

No action was taken by the Government at that time, but in 1748 the Bristol M.P.s warned the Society about another scheme for regulating the African trade, and the Society invited all its members, and also other Bristolians trading to Africa, to give their views. A copy of the letter from the M.P.s was left in the Coffee House.[42] In the next two years there was considerable activity on the part of the Society and its African Committee. The Society's view was that the trade should be open to all, but that it should be regulated by a company managed by a committee on which there was an equal number of representatives from Bristol, London and Liverpool. The admission fee should be fixed by Act of Parliament at 40s. The M.P.s were to be informed that a joint-stock company would be highly prejudicial to Bristol.[43]

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[35] *H.B. 4*, 24 April 1711, 11 Dec. 1711, 14 Dec. 1711, 20 Dec. 1711, 12 April 1712, 2 Feb. 1713, 10 Nov. 1713. On 10 Nov. 1713, for example, John Day was instructed to attend Parliament "to take care about the Affrica, Tobaccoe and other trades relating to this City". A sum not exceeding £200 was voted for his expenses.

[36] *H.B. 4*, 8 Dec. 1719; 1 Feb. 1720; 20 Dec. 1720.

[37] *H.B. 5*, 23 Dec. 1724.

[38] *H.B. 5*, 23 Feb. 1725.

[39] *H.B. 5*, 17 Dec. 1725, 10 March 1726, 12 May 1726, 16 June 1726, 20 July 1726, 25 Nov. 1728. *Book of Charters 2*, 258 for undated petition which probably refers to this attempt.

[40] *H.B. 5*, 10 Feb. 1729, 13 March 1729, 29 March 1729, 3 Nov. 1729, 28 Nov. 1729, 24 Jan. 1730. *Book of Charters 2*, 233 ff., 267 ff.

[41] *H.B. 6*, 11 Sept. and 12 Sept. 1744. *Book of Charters 2*, 289–92.

[42] *H.B. 7*, 6 Feb. 1748.

A fierce struggle ensued in which the Society fought side by side with merchants from London, Liverpool and other ports.[44] There was a great deal of petitioning and lobbying, and what emerged was very satisfactory from the point of view of Bristol traders. A new African Company was established to handle the Government grants for the maintenance of the African forts. Any one might join on payment of 40s., and the managers of the Company were to consist of 9 representatives, of whom 3 were to be elected by members in London, 3 by Liverpool and 3 by Bristol.[45]

The Act of 1750 in some degree decreased the direct responsibility of the Merchant Venturers for protecting Bristol's interests in the African trade, since there were now in Bristol three representatives elected by the whole body of members of the new African Company, many of whom were not Merchant Venturers. Nevertheless, the Society continued to take a great interest in the African trade in spite of the existence of this separate pressure group.[46] From the very beginning, it maintained close contact with it and with the African Committee of Nine in London. The Society's Clerks Samuel Worrall and, later, Jeremiah Osborne collected the fees of the Bristol members of the African Company, attended the annual meetings for the election of the Bristol representatives, and returned the names of those elected to London.[47] In the early days of the new arrangement, the Society negotiated with the Committee of Nine for repayment of the expenses of the Society in connection with procuring the Act of Parliament, and also helped the local branch over its teething troubles at a time when "the said Company had no stocks in their Corporate Capacity for the payment of such Expenses".[48]

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[43] *H.B.* 7, 26 Feb. 1748, 17 March 1748. *Book of Charters 2*, 313, 315.

[44] *H.B.* 7, 25 March 1748, 28 Jan. 1749, 9 May 1749, 29 July 1749, 2 Sept. 1749, 9 Sept. 1749, 21 Oct. 1749, 23 Oct. 1749, 28 Oct. 1749, 30 Oct. 1749, 20 Nov. 1749, 9 Dec. 1749, 14 Dec. 1749, 13 Jan. 1750, 22 Jan. 1750, 27 Jan. 1750, 2 Feb. 1750, 12 March 1750. See also the letters and petitions printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 67–9, 71–6.

[45] *Statutes at Large*, vi, 497–8. There are copies of the Act in the Society's records.

[46] The bundles of papers long stored by the Society in a box marked *African Trade* relate primarily to the Society's dealings with the African Company's Committee of Nine in London. The Committee sent its annual accounts to the Clerk and these throw light on Bristol membership of the Company. 156 Bristolians joined the Company before 30 June 1750. There were 90 admissions for Bristol in 1754 and 32 in 1755. Thereafter, there was a small number of new members year by year (Bundle A).

[47] Box marked *African Trade*: Bundle C. Society's *Letters*, bdle. 7, letter from African Office in London to Worrall about the elections, 5 May 1762; bdle. 26,

On African matters, the Society dealt both with the African Committee in London and directly with the Bristol M.P.s. At the request of the three Bristol representatives of the Company, it wrote to Robert Nugent in support of the view that the Government should continue its grant for the maintenance of the forts, and in 1762 it backed the Company's request to the Government for better protection for the trade.[49] It collected evidence about the trade for the Bristol M.P.s in 1770, and it was consulted by Lord Clare in 1772 about its views on a proposal that no one should have a vote for the election of members of the African Committee of Nine unless he had £500 actually employed in the trade. The Standing Committee supported this view and suggested that members should be required to take an oath to this effect on election day. It evidently had no love for the small trader.[50] When the export of gunpowder and arms was prohibited in 1756 and 1774, the Society protested that this would harm the African trade, and asked that it might be permitted on certain conditions.[51] When in 1777, the African Committee in London asked for views about a petition on the bad state of the trade and enquired whether the Bristol merchants were satisfied with the protection they received, the Society consulted Liverpool with a view to joint action.[52] In 1786, it decided if necessary to support the London Committee of Nine in complaints about French encroachments at Amissa, and in 1787 it backed it in its protests about outrages committed by the natives.[53] In these and in other matters there was close liaison between the Society and the new organisation.

Although the main issue had in fact been settled by the Act of 1750, there was always danger that the trade, or part of it, might be again restricted as a result of special pleading by interested

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letter from African Office to Osborne, telling him about his duties. He received 1 guinea for attending to the annual election, 5s. for cleaning the Hall, and £2 2s. 6d. for every new freeman admitted, 17 May 1787.

[48] *H.B. 8*, 31 July 1754, 30 Nov. 1754, 5 March 1755, 24 July 1755. *H.B. 9*, 6 Jan. 1763, 24 March 1763; *African Trade* box, Bdle. F, 24 July 1755.

[49] *H.B. 8*, 27 March 1756; 15 March and 24 March 1762; Minchinton, *Port and Politics*, p. 95.

[50] *H.B. 9*, 11 March 1772; *H.B. 10*, 1 March 1773. For correspondence on this subject between John Arbuthnot and Paul Farr, see *African Trade Box*, Bdle. C. For two letters from Lord Clare, see Society's *Letters*, bdle. 16, 5 March and 12 March 1772. Clare was opposed to the proposal of limiting voting rights.

[51] *Book of Charters 2*, 335, 338, 6 July 1756; *H.B. 10*, 31 Oct. 1774, 21 Nov. 1774.

[52] *H.B. 10*, 17 Feb. 1777, 19 March, 9 Feb. 1778, 23 Feb. 1778.

[53] *H.B. 11*, p. 255, 7 Nov. 1786; p. 288, 16 Jan. 1787.

parties. The dreaded monopoly might be restored. Thus, in 1773 there was correspondence with Lord Clare about an African bill. There was a fear that those behind it might really be aiming at a joint-stock company – "they now only nibble at what they mean to subvert". The great City of London was espousing the bill "and by espousing it render it ten Times more suspicious".[54] When the Society received information from London in 1779 that a committee of the House of Commons intended to report in favour of a joint-stock company, it hastened to seek support from Liverpool and alerted its M.P.s and other interested supporters.[55]

Resistance was also offered to a proposal put forward in the seventeen-sixties that the trade of Senegal, which had been taken from the French, should be placed in the hands of a group of Londoners. Samuel Touchet, who claimed to have been of great service in its capture, was seeking to obtain special privileges from the Government. The Society stated that it was opposed to such a monopoly, which would send up prices. If Touchet had suffered any loss in the expedition to Senegal, he should be compensated, but the trade must remain open, preferably under the African Company. In this matter, the Society cooperated with the African Company's representatives in Bristol and with London and Liverpool merchants.[56] In 1765, the Society supported a proposal, which became law, by which the government took over Senegal and Zambia.[57] Another attempt to monopolise the trade of those areas in 1767 was also resisted,[58] as was a proposal in 1791 to incorporate a company to trade to Sierra Leone.[59]

The commerce with Africa was, of course, an essential part of the triangular trade which linked Bristol with Africa and with the West Indian and American colonies, and both West Indian and African merchants were concerned about anything which interfered with it. One hindrance was the practice of a number of colonies of imposing taxes on the import of slaves. This resulted in action by the Society on a number of occasions. In 1725, 20 guineas were paid to Mr. Mereweather in London as part of his charges in helping get a repeal of an Act of the Assembly of Virginia which imposed duties on negroes and rum.[60] Two years later, the Society was active in opposing a duty on the import of slaves imposed by Jamaica.[61] Both Virginia and Jamaica continued to give trouble, and the Society intervened several times.[62]

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[54] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 17, Lord Clare, 23 Feb. 1773.

[55] *H.B. 10*, 8 April 1779; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 22, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, 12 April 1779; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 147.

[56] For Touchet and Senegal, see *H.B. 9*, 6 Jan. 1763, 8 Jan. 1763, 3 Feb. 1763; *Book of Charters 1*, 363; *H.B. 9*, 16 Jan. 1764, 11 Feb. 1764. Society's *Letters*, bdle. 8, Samuel Poirier, Secretary of the African Company, 22 Dec. 1762; 18 March 1763; bdle. 9, Nugent, 5 March 1766; Poirier, 18 March 1763. Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 96–8.

[57] *H.B. 9*, 9 March 1765. See *African Trade Box* for a copy of the Act of 1765.

[58] *H.B. 9*, 31 Jan. 1767.

[59] *H.B. 12*, p. 125, 7 April 1791; p. 128, 30 April 1791; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 113 ff. Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 175.

Of much greater significance were the proposals in the seventeen-eighties to regulate and to abolish the slave trade. By this time, Bristol's share in the trade was small compared with that of Liverpool,[63] but many merchants who were not directly involved saw the threat which abolition of the trade would constitute to the important West Indian trade, and there was fierce opposition from many quarters.

The first serious danger came in 1788 when Sir William Dolben introduced a bill to regulate conditions on slave ships and to control the number of slaves that could be carried. The Society and other interested parties petitioned against the bill, arguing that "it will not only very much injure the trade, but will when it shall be known in our colonies, excite such a spirit of mutiny as to give your petitioners the most serious concern . . .".[64]

Regulation of the trade was bad enough, but there now emerged a much more menacing proposal to abolish the trade completely. In 1789, a committee of the Privy Council heard evidence, and a number of Bristolians gave their views, both favourable and unfavourable. When the report was published, it was clear that supporters of the slave trade had a formidable case to answer and that there would be a great deal of support for a bill proposing abolition.[65] Resistance to abolition was not, of course, limited to Bristol. Liverpool and London were heavily involved, and the African Company and the West India Committee in the capital did their best to stir up opposition among their members in London and in the provincial ports. In Bristol, West India merchants and those engaged in the African trade were seriously disturbed, as were industrialists and plantation owners in and around the city. London and Liverpool in large measure supplied the leadership for a national campaign. The role of the Society of Merchant Venturers was largely that of a coordinator between Bristol opponents of abolition, many of whom were not Merchant Venturers, and the leaders of the national campaign.

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[60] *H.B. 5*, 4 March 1725.

[61] *H.B. 5*, 18 Oct. 1727; 10 Sept. 1728.

[62] *H.B. 5*, 4 Oct. 1728, 3 Jan. 1732, 11 May 1732, 17 May 1732; *H.B. 6*, 26 Nov. 1733, 19 Jan. 1736, *H.B. 9*, 6 Feb. 1770; *H.B. 10*, 31 Oct. 1774, 13 March 1775; *Book of Charters 2*, 27, 275; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 24–5, 25–6, 37–8.

[63] Clearances from Bristol for Africa were 16 in 1785, 20 in 1786, 31 in 1787 and 17 in 1788, of which between a half and one third were slaving voyages. Peter Marshall, *The Anti-Slave Trade Movement in Bristol*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1968, p. 1.

[64] The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 162–3. When Liverpool asked for help with its expenses, the Society replied that it had sent its own representatives and that Liverpool should approach the African Company. *H.B. 11*, p. 446, 24 July 1788; p. 449, 22 Aug. 1788. See also the Society's *Letters*, bdle. 28, Stephen Fuller from London, 7 July 1788. He has received the petition against the bill and delivered it to the Duke of Chandos.

[65] Peter Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

The Standing Committee was informed on 3 April 1789 that the House of Commons would consider total abolition of the trade on 23 April. It decided to put an advertisement in the Bristol and Bath papers asking all interested in the trade or in the manufactures connected with it or in the welfare of the West Indian islands to meet in the Hall on 13 April.[66] At that meeting, "a very numerous and respectable Body of Merchants Manufactures and others residing in this City and its neighbourhood" passed a number of resolutions and set up a committee of 47 members to prepare petitions against abolition.[67] The Committee of 47 consisted of African merchants, West India merchants and planters, and manufacturers. Rather less than half of the total were Merchant Venturers.[68]

It was decided on 15 April that the Minutes of the meeting on 13 April should be printed in the Bristol and Bath papers and in two London papers – the *Diary* and the *Public Ledger*. Three separate petitions were to be prepared – from the African merchants, from the West India merchants and planters, and from the industrialists, and three sub-committees were set up for this purpose. On 22 April there was a meeting at the Hall to settle the petitions, and the drafts were sent to the Clerk to be copied. Letters were also sent to the M.P.s for Somerset and Gloucestershire. There was another meeting in the Clerk's Office on 25 April when it was ordered that the petitions should be sent by mail coach to London the next day. The final entry in the Minute Book of this *ad hoc* committee was on 3 June 1789 when the West India merchants argreed to raise a fund by paying 6d. on every hogshead and puncheon imported.

Not only did the Society help the Committee of 47 by making the Hall available for meetings and by providing the services of its Clerk, but it also campaigned independently. A General Hall of 25 April 1789 approved a petition "praying that a Commerce, which constitutes so considerable a part of the trade of the Kingdom, and on which the existence of the West India Islands depends, may not be abolished nor put under any further Restraints until the same have undergone that cool and dispassionate Inquiry which so important a Question demands". The Standing Committee was instructed to deal with any other petitions that might be required, to send representatives to London, to correspond with other bodies and to incur expenses up to £200.[69]

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[66] *H.B. 11*, p. 498, 3 April 1789.

[67] The proceedings of this Committee are preserved in the Merchants' Hall in a paper-covered book marked "Slave Trade" with a label "Meetings of the W.I. Society 1789". They begin with the meeting in the Hall on 13 April and conclude with a meeting on 3 June 1789. There is also a good deal of information in the papers in the box marked *African Trade*, Bdle. G, including a list of the 47 members of the Committee.

[68] Based on an examination of the names given in *African Trade Box*, Bdle. G. In a few cases, there is difficulty about identification.

One of the Bristol merchants who was active against abolition, Lowbridge Bright, was not quite happy about the way in which the petition was handled. Writing to the Clerk, Jeremiah Osborne, on 25 April 1789 he promised to deliver at his office by eleven o'clock the next day the petition from the African merchants, shipowners and wholesalers as well as the petitions of the West India merchants. He pointed out that "the Gentlemen have signed their names so very close that the number does not appear so great as it really is", and he thought it would not be improper to say in a covering letter that the signatures were of those materially concerned, and to magnify the number and importance by pointing out that the petitions were independent of "the seals of two great publick Bodies". They could not fail to show "how large a part of the people of Property and Consequence in this City are Enemies to the propos'd total Abolition".[70]

Wilberforce opened the battle in Parliament on behalf of the abolitionists on 12 May, and on the same day there were presented to the House six petitions from Bristol against abolition, the three organised by the Committee of 47, one from the Corporation, one from the Newfoundland Merchants, and one from the Society.[71] The M.P.s for Bristol, Matthew Brickdale and Henry Cruger, kept the opponents of abolition informed of what was going on through the Society of Merchant Venturers,[72] and at the same time the Society took steps to protest against a proposal to reduce further the number of slaves which could be carried in a ship.[73] In the face of determined opposition, the attempt to abolish the slave trade failed. By the time it was abolished in 1806, Bristol had ceased to be involved to any extent in the trade.[74]

The West India trade, which was much more important and much more lucrative than the rather risky African trade, received much less attention from the Society, not because it did not matter so much, but because it presented fewer problems.[75] It was not threatened by a monopolistic Company and it did not raise any issues as controversial as the proposed abolition of the slave trade.

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[69] *H.B. II*, pp. 505, 506, 25 April 1789. It may seem surprising that only 14 members were present. Possibly some of the others felt that they had already done their bit in other petitions.

[70] *African Trade Box*, Lowbridge Bright to Jeremiah Osborne, 25 April 1789.

[71] Peter Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[72] Peter Marshall, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–15.

[73] *H.B. II*, p. 516, 3 July 1789.

[74] For the reasons, see Peter Marshall, *op. cit.*, pp. 22 ff.

All colonial trade was, of course, regulated by the Acts of Trade which channelled colonial produce through the mother country and prohibited direct trade between the colonies and other countries, including Ireland. The system suited English merchants very well, since it placed them in the happy position of middlemen for the re-export of colonial produce, and it was not seriously challenged in the eighteenth century. Only occasionally was it necessary for the Society to take action. In 1726, it petitioned the King about the Jamaica trade, alleging that the Dutch and the French were trading illegally with the island and competing with British manufactures.[76] In 1739, it opposed a bill to allow the colonies to export sugar direct to foreign markets and protested that this "would be of the utmost ill-consequence to the petitioners . . . and a great destruction of trade and navigation . . .".[77] As we have seen, the Society took a very strong line in the seventeen-seventies when the Government was forced to modify the regulations about colonial trade for the benefit of Ireland, and on that occasion the merchants suffered a defeat.[78]

In the first part of the century, there was a good deal of interference with British ships trading to the West Indies by Spanish cruisers and coastguards which arrested the ships and committed "depredations" against vessels which, they alleged, were trading illegally with the Spanish colonies. The Society intervened on numerous occasions in an attempt to get redress for "Spanish depredations". When in 1725 Mr. Lionel Lyde reported that his ship the *Anna Maria* had been intercepted by Spanish coastguards when coming from Jamaica, the Society set up a committee to look into this and other outrages and drew up a petition. Spanish interference with the Jamaica trade continued to give trouble, and other petitions were presented on a number of occasions in the seventeen-twenties and seventeen-thirties.[79] Such complaints formed part of the great volume of protest from English merchants which helped lead to war with Spain in 1739.

A number of other relatively small issues required action by the

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[75] For the number of ships involved, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 181, and *The Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 3.

[76] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 23, 24.

[77] *Ibid.*, pp. xxx, 50–1. See also *H.B. 6*, 22 March 1739 and *H.B. 9*, 15 March 1766.

[78] See pp. 128–30.

[79] For the Lyde case, see *H.B. 5*, 9 July 1725, 20 July 1725, 19 April 1726. For petitions against Spanish depredations, see Minchinton, *Port and Politics*, pp. 22, 23, 26, 39–41, 45–6, 47, 48–50. See also, Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 188–90.

Society. Although it supported the principles behind the Acts of Trade, it saw the advantage of allowing foreign colonies to bring their produce to certain ports in the West Indies where it would be available for export to England, and it therefore backed bills in 1766 and later to make Dominica, Jamaica, Barbados and Antigua "free ports" for this purpose.[80] The Merchant Venturers were also concerned with anything which affected the economy or political well-being of the islands with which they had so valuable a trade. In 1754, they supported an application from merchants in Jamaica for the removal of the seat of government from Spanish Town to the more convenient Kingston,[81] and in 1767 they endorsed a petition from Liverpool that Dominica should be independent of Grenada.[82] They backed a proposal in 1773 to encourage foreigners to lend money to owners of estates in the West Indies,[83] and they were outraged by a suggestion in 1781 that the Government should confiscate all private property in the captured islands of St. Eustatius and St. Martin. They thought that "the well-grounded and established policy of every nation of Europe holds sacred in time of war the property of individuals . . .". Moreover, English as well as foreign capital was involved.[84] In 1782, when they were informed by an agent in Jamaica that there was great fear that the enemy would attack the island, the Standing Committee was instructed to consider the matter, and letters were to be sent to the M.P.s.[85] When the war was over, they were so concerned about the economy of the West Indies that they petitioned for a modification of the Acts of Trade so that the trade in rum, lumber and provisions between America and the islands need not be entirely restricted to British-built ships.[86] Their opposition to the proposed abolition of the slave trade arose partly from a fear that it might lead to serious disorders in the West Indies and have damaging effects on the economy of the islands.

The trade with the American mainland was of great importance to Bristol until the outbreak of trouble in the colonies in the seventeen-seventies resulted in a drastic decline from which it did not fully recover, even after the Peace of 1783. In 1764 52 ships out of a total of 343 cleared the port for North America, as compared with 53 for the West Indies and 32 for Africa.[87] For Bristol, the plantation trade with Virginia and South Carolina was far more important than the trade with the northern colonies, but anything that went on in America was of concern to Bristolians if it affected their trade, and from time to time the Society intervened to influence parliamentary and governmental policy.

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[80] *H.B. 9*, 2 April 1766; *H.B. 10*, 12 Feb. and 26 Feb. 1774; *H.B. 11*, p. 130, 26 March 1785. Their petitions for 1766, 1774 and 1785 are printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 124–6, 155. There are a considerable number of references to this issue in the *Hall Books* and *Letters*.

[81] *H.B. 9*, 12 June 1754, 2 Sept. 1754, 30 Dec. 1754; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 81–2.

[82] *H.B. 8*, 10 Aug. 1767, 17 Aug. 1767, 4 Feb. 1768.

[83] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 17, Brickdale, 23 Jan. 1773; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 122.

[84] For their petition, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 150.

[85] *H.B. 10*, 6 May 1782.

[86] The petition of 14 June 1784 is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 152–3.

In the early seventeen-thirties there was a great deal of controversy about whether molasses from foreign colonies might be sent direct to Great Britain and her colonies, and when the Government was considering action which eventually led to the Molasses Act of 1733, the Society intervened and sent representatives to London to support alternative proposals.[88] In 1731 and 1732, it complained about the difficulty in recovering debts due to British merchants in America,[89] and in 1736 it agreed to cooperate with London in opposing a plan by which Carolina could raise £210,000 in paper credit.[90] In the same year, it supported legislation to encourage the import of plantation cotton.[91]

Industrial development in the American colonies was permissible, provided it did not compete with English interests, and in 1750, in response to a request from several merchants and others not free of the Society, the Hall gave support to a bill permitting the import of American bar and pig iron into the port of London, duty free. It argued that England was not producing enough herself.[92] At the request of the Bristol iron merchants, it paid a share of the cost of an application to Parliament in 1757 that this privilege should be extended to other ports besides London.[93] On the other hand, industrial development which competed with English manufactures must be resisted, and in 1773 the Society joined in the successful opposition to a plan to allow steel to be made in America and exported to Britain.[94]

Other miscellaneous activities by the Society in relation to America included consideration of proposals to take off the duties on pearl and potash imported from Carolina, to alter the laws in Virginia relating to the payment of debts, to permit the import of foreign sugar when colonial sugar exceeded a certain price, and to give a bounty on the import of raw silk from America.[95] Further, since the unsatisfactory state of the American currency was a grievance for the merchants as well as for the colonists, the Master was instructed in 1767 to write to Lord Clare to ask him to promote and accelerate the granting of liberty to the colonies to issue paper money under proper regulations. It was argued that if the colonists had a satisfactory paper currency, they would probably remit to England the bullion which at present they kept for their own needs.[96]

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[87] For this and other figures, see Minchinton, *The Trade of Bristol*, p. 181; *The Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 3.

[88] *H.B. 5*, 2 Jan. 1733, 9 Jan. 1733, 14 March 1733; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxx, 41–2.

[89] *H.B. 5*, 14 Dec. 1731, 3 Jan. 1732. The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 36–7.

[90] *H.B. 6*, 10 Sept. 1736.

[91] The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 43–4.

[92] *H.B. 7*, 20 March 1750, 22 March 1750; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxv, 76.

[93] *H.B. 8*, 19 Jan. 1757.

[94] *H.B. 10*, 23 Feb. 1773; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 17, 26 Feb. 1773 from Clare and from Brickdale; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 123.

Such issues were in the ordinary run of business, and it was not until the mid-seventeen-sixties that the American trade presented the Society with any major problems. Even before the passing of the Stamp Act in 1765, the Society was concerned about the state of trade, and in March of that year it petitioned parliament and suggested various remedies.[97] When the Stamp Act damaged trade still further, the Society joined with others in the attempt to secure its repeal, and this succeeded in 1767.[98]

The repeal of the Stamp Act, however, did not end the trouble, for the issues were extremely complicated, and many questions were involved, quite apart from that of whether it was reasonable to ask the prosperous colonies to make some contribution to imperial defence. It was not a matter of one side being clearly right and the other clearly wrong, and in any case the issues, and the emphasis placed on them, changed a great deal in the years between the passing of the Stamp Act in 1765 and the American Declaration of Independence in 1776.[99]

In these years, the Society was torn between its desire to restore the trade to its former prosperity and its view that the Government was trying to behave sensibly when confronted with unreasonable demands. Its attitude was ambiguous and it was in no position to give a clear lead to the merchant community of Bristol. There was, moreover, a division of opinion between the city's M.P.s, Edmund Burke and Henry Cruger, on whether a conciliatory policy should be followed. The Society itself was divided and was unwilling to put itself at the head of those merchants in Bristol who supported Burke.[100] On the other hand, unless something was done, the disastrous commercial situation would become even worse. The Society's concern about trade was shown in a letter which the Master sent to Matthew Brickdale, M.P., on 22 January 1770. He pointed out that the merchants had orders from America worth £2 million, but that these were conditional on the Revenue Act being repealed. Moreover, South Carolina was threatening to stop the importation of negroes.[101] Lord Clare was told that unless the M.P.s could help, "our Trade to North America must remain in its present melancholy situation".[102] Nevertheless, there was hesitation in supporting demands for conciliation. No action was taken in November 1774 when seven merchants trading to America asked the Master to call a Hall to consider certain proposals,[103] and there was hesitation about backing a petition drafted by Burke in January 1775. On 11 January 1775, 37 members were present when a motion to petition the House of Commons "passed in the negative on the Masters casting voice". Nevertheless, it was decided to meet about American affairs next Monday and "finally to determine the conduct of the Society touching the same . . .".[104] Thirty-four members were present, and the Hall decided that two representatives from "the committee of the Merchants of this City at large", who were waiting outside, should be called in. A motion that the petition drafted by Burke should be approved was carried by 25 votes to 9. The petition pointed out the importance of the American trade, deplored the disturbances to which it had been subjected, and left it to the wisdom of the house to take what steps seemed best to close "the destructive breaches made in their trade . . .".[105] The Bristol petition, together with petitions from other towns, was ordered by the House of Commons to lie on the table.

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[95] *H.B. 7*, 11 Feb. 1751 (pearl and potash from Carolina); 21 Oct. 1751 (debts in Virginia); *H.B. 8*, 19 March 1753 (foreign sugar). For American raw silk, see *H.B. 9*, 22 Jan. 1770; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 13 from Brickdale, 24 April 1769; bdle. 14, 17 Jan. 1770; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 112–13.

[96] *H.B. 9*, 25 Feb. 1767.

[97] *H.B. 9*, 12 March 1765, 13 March 1765. Society's *Letters*, bdle. 9, from Nugent, 7 March and 12 March 1765. The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 100–1.

[98] For its correspondence with the London Committee, with Birmingham and Liverpool and with the M.P.s Jarritt Smith and Nugent, see the Society's *Letters*, bdle. 10, 4 Dec. 1765, 6 December 1765, 26 Dec. 1765, 31 Dec. 1765, 17 March 1766, 18 March 1766, 22 March 1766.

[99] For a study of Bristol's attitude to the complex American question, see Wesley Savage, "The west-country and the American mainland, 1763–1783, with special reference to the merchants of Bristol", Oxford B. Litt. thesis, 1952. See also P. T. Underdown, *Bristol and Burke*, p. 10 ff., and bibliographical notes in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. xxxviii and *Trade of Bristol*, p. xxv.

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[100] P. T. Underdown, *Bristol and Burke*, pp. 10 ff, for a summary of the position in Bristol.

[101] *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 22 Jan. 1770.

[102] *Ibid.*, 6 Feb. 1770.

[103] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 19, 24 Nov. 1774.

[104] *H.B. 10*, 11 Jan. 1775.

[105] The petition is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 130–2. Dr. Underdown's statement about Burke's petition (*Bristol and Burke*, p. 12) that "the delaying tactics of the Master and committee of the Society of Merchant Venturers bade fair to secure its rejection, for a second Hall (at which non-members were present to ensure a pro-Burke majority) had to be convened before the petition was adopted. . . ." seems to me to go far beyond the evidence.

The Society ignored Burke's request for further action to assist his policy of conciliation. On 19 April 1775 the first skirmish took place at Lexington, and war was more or less inevitable. It is perhaps symbolic of the ambivalent attitude of the Society towards the American problem that on 13 March 1775 it conferred the freedom of the Hall on Edmund Burke, the protagonist of conciliation, and on 10 November 1775 on Lord North whose government had decided on a policy of coercion. When, at the end of 1775, the Government prepared legislation to end all trade with the American colonies, the Society petitioned, not against the bill itself, but for leave to export provisions to the West Indies and Newfoundland and for permission to make suitable arrangements regarding business actually in hand.[106] On 18 January 1777, 32 members were present when the Hall voted by 25 votes to 6 to address the King on the success of his arms in America.[107]

The Newfoundland trade was not of major importance, and did not take up a great deal of the Society's time in this period. Only 14 ships cleared Bristol for Newfoundland in 1764. The figures fluctuated a good deal and were as high as 28 in 1775 and 25 in 1790, but this was small compared with the total number of ships leaving Bristol.[108] Some of the ships made returns direct to Bristol, but others took their fish to Spain, Portugal and the Mediterranean, and returned to Bristol with oil, fruit and wine. There were no very controversial issues, and intervention by the Society was necessary on only a few occasions. In 1711, the Standing Committee was instructed to consider petitioning the Council of Trade and Plantations about the trade to Newfoundland and Africa. It decided that there should be a petition, and it was empowered to draw one up about Newfoundland and other matters and to employ a solicitor in London.[109] It is not clear whether it actually sent it in its own name, for the petition in the records of the Council of Trade and Plantations is not from the Society as such but from Samuel Shaw and 28 other merchants of Bristol trading to Newfoundland. It suggested that Great Britain ought to obtain "the sole benefitt of the Fishery and trade to Newfoundland" and that the peace negotiations which were in hand presented the best opportunity for regaining the trade to this kingdom.[110]

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[106] *H.B. 10*, 2 Dec. 1775, 14 Dec. 1775, 5 Feb. 1776. For the petitions, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 136–7, 139.

[107] *H.B. 10*, 18 Jan. 1777.

[108] For these and other figures, see Minchinton, *Trade of Bristol*, p. 181; *The Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 3.

[109] *H.B. 4*, 11 Dec. 1711, 14 Dec. 1711, 20 Dec. 1711; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 9.

[110] *Cal. S.P. Colonial, America and the West Indies*, no. 234, p. 185.

In the seventeen-sixties, at the request of the Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, the Society considered a proposal to erect forts to protect the fisheries, and, after consulting Dartmouth and Poole, also gave its opinion that the establishment of civil government in Newfoundland would not be of any help to the fisheries.[111] The Society was also concerned at this time about the prohibition of the export and import of rum in vessels of less than 100 tons. It argued that the Newfoundland trade was adversely affected, as smaller vessels were often employed in it.[112]

Four other trades received some attention from the Society in the eighteenth century. They were the areas controlled by chartered companies – the Levant Company, the East India Company, the Hudson Bay Company and the South Sea Company. Bristolians were in fact engaged only in the first of these trades, but the Society was involved with the other companies because it hoped their monopolies might be broken.

The privileges of the Society's ancient enemy, the Levant Company, had survived intact the onslaught on foreign-trading companies at the end of the seventeenth century. Bristolians had won limited rights of trading to the Levant in the seventeenth century, and it was evidently necessary to safeguard the rights of the city in 1741 when a bill concerning the Levant Company came before Parliament. It was proposed that copies of the Society's charters should be sent to London and that a saving clause recognising its rights should be inserted in the bill.[113] Ten years later, when the Society received information from Liverpool that there was a possibility of opening the trade, a committee which was instructed to examine the charters reported that members of the Hall had a right to trade to any port to which the Levant or Turkey Company traded.[114] Eventually, the attack on the Company met with some success. It was not abolished, but the conditions for membership were considerably relaxed.[115] In this attack, the Society was only one of a number of pressure groups. It is probable that it joined in to assert its dislike of monopolistic companies rather than because Bristol interests were deeply concerned.

The monopoly of the East India Company was of interest to the Society on occasions, partly because it was a monopoly and partly because the actions of the Company could have adverse affects on Bristol. In 1721, the Hall was informed by Joseph Earle, a Merchant Venturer and M.P. for Bristol, that the Company had made certain representations to the Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, and the Standing Committee was instructed to prepare petitions if necessary.[116] Twenty years later, another Merchant Venturer M.P., Sir Abraham Elton, wrote to the Hall about the high price of saltpetre. He argued that the East India Company was the sole importer and put up the price. This harmed merchants who were fitting out ships of war or who were engaged in the African trade, and it induced people to get supplies from Holland, where they also laid out money on foreign manufactures. He wanted the Hall to join Liverpool and other ports in petitioning Parliament for liberty to import saltpetre from any country.[117] As instructed, the Standing Committee drew up a petition, but it was not apparently presented.[118]

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[111] *H.B. 9*, 24 Dec. 1762 (given in error as Nov.); 3 Jan. 1763, 13 Dec. 1763, 10 Jan. 1764.

[112] For the petition of 4 April 1766, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 106, 107.

[113] *H.B. 6*, 2 April 1741.

[114] *H.B. 7*, 11 and 13 Feb. 1751.

[115] *Statutes at Large*, vii, 24.

There was also difficulty about certain other goods imported by the East India Company which were required for the African trade. Robert Nugent reported in 1765 that he had suggested in Parliament that there was a scarcity in Bristol and Liverpool of some of the things necessary to make up the assortments sent to the African coast and that this led to merchants being driven to buy them in the Isle of Man and in Holland. He blamed the East India Company and also the high duty on things such as beads, and he suggested that permission should be given to import them from elsewhere if our own East India Company did not supply them in sufficient quantities. Certain goods might be imported duty free and put in bonded warehouses until they were required for the African market. He asked for comment and information to be supplied quickly, adding "The time is short, but I know you are always well prepared".[119]

A more fundamental issue was raised in a letter from Liverpool merchants which the Standing Committe considered on 18 February 1768. It proposed that there should be an extension of the trade to Asia by increasing the stock and by allowing Bristol, Hull, Glasgow and Liverpool to participate. It said that Liverpool had appointed representatives to go to London, and it asked Bristol to do likewise.[120] Liverpool by this time was said "to vie with Bristol in riches",[121] and this proposal from a dangerous rival was not at first received with enthusiasm. The Standing Committee returned the lukewarm and non-committal answer that it had not heard of the proposal, but that it would be ready to join in any measure to extend commerce.[122] Three months later, a General Hall at which 29 members were present considered the plan about Asiatic commerce which was intended "to make it as extensive and consequently as national as the nature of that Commerce will bear . . .", and the Standing Committee was instructed to consider it further.[123] The matter came up again in June when Liverpool proposed that the outports should agree to petition against the renewal of the East India Company's Charter and that they should be allowed a share in the trade, or at least to trade to the newly-conquered parts of India. Liverpool also suggested that deputies should go to London from Bristol, Liverpool, Hull, Glasgow and Leith. In July, after obtaining further information from Liverpool, the Hall decided that the Master and any others interested should go to London to meet representatives from other ports, and it voted £50 to Mr. Harris for his trouble in coming to Bristol about the matter.[124] In Parliament, where the East India interest was strong, the proposal aroused no enthusiasm, and Brickdale reported the ill-success of the plan and remarked that the House thought it very strange to receive petitions to open a trade established by Charter under an Act of Parliament.[125] The Society probably felt few regrets. It had intervened only because it felt that if there was to be something for the outports, it ought to be involved.

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[116] *H.B. 4*, 4 March 1721. It is not clear what this was about. There had been an appeal to the House of Commons to open the trade in 1719 (*Commons' Journals*, xix, 79).

[117] *H.B. 6*, 12 Feb. 1741.

[118] For the petition, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 53–4.

[119] *H.B. 9*, 14 Jan. 1765, 6 March and 12 March 1765. Society's *Letters*, bdle. 9, Nugent to the Society, 12 Jan. 1765.

[120] *H.B. 9*, 18 Feb. 1768; *Commons' Journal*, xxxii, 102.

[121] Historical Manuscripts Commission: *Verulam*, p. 271.

Bristol's interest in the South Sea Company arose because of the competition which that Company offered to those engaged in the African slave trade. The South Sea Company was a joint-stock company incorporated in 1710, with a monopoly of the trade to a large part of South America. In 1713, it acquired the right to supply 4,800 negroes a year to the Spanish colonies for a period of 30 years. It apparently secured its slaves by trading directly to Africa instead of by buying them in the West Indies from those already engaged in the trade. In 1720, the Master reported to the Hall that the African trade was in danger of being monopolised by the Company or some other interest, and that the Mayor and Common Council had asked him and two others to go to London to try to prevent it. The Standing Committee was instructed to correspond with the Master, to pay half the charge of the deputation, and to draw up a petition.[126] The issue was raised again in 1729 when some members complained that the South Sea Company was still carrying on the slave trade to the detriment of traders in general in Bristol. On 13 March 1729, three representatives were appointed to go to London, and a petition was prepared on 22 March. It argued that the South Sea Company had no right to engage in the African trade and that it had no need to do so, since it could obtain all the negroes it required in the West Indies. Moreover, it could buy them there "not only much cheaper, but more certainly" and could obtain a "properer assortment than it is possible for them to import themselves". The Society maintained that the Company was aiming at "beating out the private merchants" and at securing a monopoly.[127] There were no further complaints, and in 1750 England made a treaty with Spain by which, in return for compensation, the South Sea Company surrendered its right to take slaves to Spanish America.

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[122] *H.B. 9*, 18 Feb. 1768.

[123] *H.B. 9*, 28 April 1768.

[124] *H.B. 9*, 30 June and 5 July 1768.

[125] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 13, Brickdale to the Society, 13 Dec. and 15 Dec. 1768. Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 111.

[126] *H.B. 4*, 1 Feb. 1720; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 10.

The monopoly held by the Hudson Bay Company also attracted brief attention from the Society of Merchant Venturers at one point in the eighteenth century, not because of any burning desire of members to trade to Hudson's Bay, but because the Society felt it only proper for Bristol to join any attack on a trading monopoly. In the late seventeen-forties there was widespread criticism of the Company in parliament, and the Society was asked to participate.[128] It decided to prepare a petition asking for the trade to be free and open, and the arguments it put forward were very similar to those used in petitions from many other places.[129] No doubt they had a common origin. The attack failed and the monopoly was preserved. Although in 1765, Mr. Christopher Willoughby said he thought the Merchant Venturers had a right to trade to Hudson's Bay and the Standing Committee was asked to look into the matter and take action if necessary, nothing more was done.[130]

It will be clear from this examination of the Society's work that the trade of Bristol was a major preoccupation in the eighteenth century and that the Society was involved in continual activity to further the commercial interests of the city. It used every available means to make its influence felt – sending agents to London, maintaining contact with individuals and groups in the capital and in other ports, preparing innumerable petitions and corresponding with the M.P.s and other influential people who might help it. It made use when necessary of the newspapers and of public meetings for propaganda purposes. It was not the only pressure group in Bristol, but it was certainly the most influential. It had notable successes as well as major failures, but it certainly spared no pains to see that the case for Bristol was put forcibly at the centre of power.

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[127] *H.B. 5*, 13 March 1729; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 27–31.

[128] *H.B. 7*, 1 April 1749. 24 members were present.

[129] *H.B. 7*, 5 April 1749, 26 April 1749 (when a man was sent to London to help prove the petition and to support the representatives already there); 9 May 1749; 20 July 1752 (when £38 18s. 6d. was still outstanding on the bill for expenses). For the petition, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxvii, 69–70.

[130] *H.B. 9*, 21 Oct. 1765 (13 members present).

CHAPTER 9

The Port, the River and Navigation in the Eighteenth Century

THE prosperity of Bristol obviously depended on it having adequate accommodation for the ships using the port and satisfactory approaches to the docks from the Bristol Channel and the mouth of the Avon. The natural disadvantages from which Bristol suffered became all the more serious in this period when the number and the size of ships increased considerably.[1]

The ultimate responsibility for dealing with these problems belonged to the Corporation of Bristol, but a very special obligation lay on the Society of Merchant Venturers, because the Corporation had delegated many of its powers to the Society and had granted it the right to collect wharfage money in return for an undertaking to construct and maintain the quays. Moreover, the Society had in practice made itself responsible for the conservancy of the river, for providing and maintaining the cranes and for appointing and supervising the pilots in the river and the Channel. The Society was not, therefore, merely a private body without public responsibility. Much depended on the way in which it handled the problems of the port and on the kind of leadership which it gave.

In 1712, the Society obtained from the Corporation a new lease of the wharfage duties for 80 years at a rent of £6 6s. 8d. in return for an agreement by which the Society gave to the city a ropewalk near Queen Square which had been a cause of complaint and which the Corporation was anxious to remove. The Society also agreed to allow the use of its Hall to members of the Council for public feasts and entertainments at convenient times.[2] The Society thus retained for a long period its major source of income, and the bargain had no relevance to improving the port.

In the first half of the century, the Society made some modest extensions of the quays. In 1700, for example, it ordered the quay to be extended by not more than 70 feet; in 1717, it decided to lengthen the quay still further, and in 1724 it ordered that two quays should be built next summer between the Gibb and the graving place. £150 was paid to John Clements for building a wall to support the ground leading to Tombs Dock.[3] It was not, however, involved in the enterprise of Joshua Franklyn and other Bristol merchants who, in 1712, formed a company with 32 shareholders, each paying approximately £300, to build a floating dock at Sea Mills. This was only the third floating dock to be built in England. It was small and had the inconvenience of being some distance from Bristol, but it was used by privateers and whalers, and it apparently went on until the seventeen-sixties.[4] The Society itself showed no enthusiasm for such schemes, and when Captain Saunders attended the Hall in 1727 on behalf of the proprietors of a dock intended to be made at Trym Mills, the Standing Committee expressed the view that it would be very useful, but that it was not proper for the Hall to undertake it.[5]

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[1] For the port in the eighteenth century, see Alan F. Williams, "Bristol Port Plans and Improvement Schemes", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxxi, 1962; W. Minchinton, *The Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1962; Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, Bristol, 1909.

[2] *H.B. 4*, 25 June 1712; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 98–9.

The Society thus did very little to improve the port during these years, and although it could be argued that the general services it rendered to Bristol justified the collection of wharfage money, only a very small proportion of that income was directly used to modernise the docks. It was not until the second half of the century that anyone took the lead in proposing improvements on a larger scale. The steady rise of trade in the seventeen-fifties and seventeen-sixties made the matter more urgent,[6] but the lead was initially taken, not by the Society of Merchant Venturers, but by the Corporation. In 1755, a committee of the Common Council pointed out that "no human prudence could prevent the growing danger to ships, without provision be made for further room . . .".[7] No further action was taken at that time, but in August 1757 a committee was appointed to consider what should be done, and in February 1758 the Corporation ordered that advertisements should be inserted in the London papers for someone to survey the Avon and the Frome, with a view to making part of them into a wet dock. Latimer thought that if the advertisement produced any plans, the estimated cost probably alarmed the Corporation. He added "At all events, it abandoned all thoughts of a dock, and fell back upon a device which cast deep discredit upon its authors."[8]

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[3] *H.B. 3*, 18 Dec. 1701; *H.B. 4*, 20 Feb. 1717, 11 May 1720; *H.B. 5*, 30 Dec. 1726; *H.B. 7*, 23 Feb. 1751; *Book of Charters 2*, 245 ff. and 251 ff. for commissions setting out the new quays.

[4] G. E. Farr, "Sea Mills Docks, Bristol", *Mariner's Mirror*, xxv, 1939, pp. 349–350; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 98, 171, 296. In 1792, the proprietors of the Sea Mills Docks offered to sell to the Society, but the Hall decided not to buy (*H.B. 12*, p. 240, 14 Nov. 1792; p. 245, 3 Dec. 1792).

[5] *H.B. 5*, 27 Feb. 1728.

[6] For the relationship between commercial expansion and port improvements, see Alan F. Williams, "Bristol Port Plans and Improvement Schemes", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxxi, 1962, pp. 151 ff.

[7] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 207; *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 316.

The discreditable "device" to which Latimer referred involved the Society of Merchant Venturers, since he meant the granting to the Society of a new wharfage lease on terms by which, in Latimer's view, the Corporation "surrendered its property in the quays and wharfage dues for nearly a century, receiving merely a nominal consideration".

Negotiations between the Merchant Venturers and the Corporation had in fact been going on at least as early as 6 September 1757, when a General Hall instructed the Standing Committee to meet the Corporation about enlarging the quays and making one or more docks.[9] They did not run smoothly. On 1 June 1758, the Standing Committee reported agreement, but in October the Corporation refused to ratify the terms agreed by the Mayor and the Surveyors of City Lands.[10] Agreement was reached on 16 January 1759,[11] but on 7 January 1761, it was reported to the Hall that the new lease agreed upon two years earlier had not been signed.[12] The Society was still considering the matter three years later, and the new wharfage lease was not in fact sealed until 7 November 1764.[13] If Latimer's view is correct and the Corporation was anxious to shelve the whole question of a floating harbour, it took its time over the decision.

Since the possibility of a floating harbour was under general discussion during these long-drawn out negotiations over the wharfage lease, the question arises whether the Society, while ostensibly showing an interest in the idea of a floating harbour, was not all the time secretly trying to do a deal with the Corporation and to obtain a lease which would benefit the Society, but which would, when made public, be certain to prejudice, if not entirely destroy, the hopes of those who wanted a floating harbour.

The chances of something being done about a floating harbour had, to all appearances, greatly increased in 1764 when at a meeting on 25 July in the Guildhall it was decided to raise £30,000 by subscription, if, after consultation with experienced judges and after plans and estimates had been received, the scheme was thought practicable. The plans and estimates were to be laid before the Mayor and Corporation as conservators of the river.[14] Although the Society had long been negotiating with the Corporation for a very different and much more limited plan, it was ostensibly interested in the scheme for a floating harbour. In September 1764, when the Hall was informed that the scheme, "having been under consideration of several merchants, who intended to attempt the same by subscription" was "at a stand for doubts as to its being practical", it agreed to join with the Corporation and to give £100 towards the expense of surveys by able engineers in order to ascertain whether the scheme could be executed.[15] The result of this was a plan, published by John Smeaton in January 1765, which proposed turning the Frome into a floating harbour by making a dam at the point where it joined the Avon.[16]

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[8] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 317.

[9] *H.B. 8*, 6 Sept. 1757.

[10] *H.B. 8*, 26 Oct. 1758.

[11] *H.B. 8*, 16 Jan. 1759.

[12] *H.B. 8*, 7 Jan. 1761.

[13] *H.B. 9*, 6 Aug. 1764, 7 Nov. 1764.

[14] Alan F. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 145; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 362.

In fact, the Society and the Corporation had already jointly sabotaged Smeaton's scheme by signing a new wharfage lease in November 1764. Although the existing lease had 28 years to run, the new lease, which was for 99 years, was granted at a token annual rent in return for the Society agreeing to construct a new quay at the Grove and a little quay, 130 feet long, at St. Augustine's Back.[17] Clearly, Smeaton's scheme did not have much chance of commanding confidence or of attracting the necessary capital if the Corporation and the Society did not give it full support and were committed to an alternative, and much more limited, scheme of their own. There were, admittedly, many problems in connection with Smeaton's plan,[18] but in view of the new wharfage agreement, it was in any case still-born. Only one third of the £30,000 required by the promoters was subscribed.[19] The project had been sold down the river by the Corporation and the Society. Nor can it be argued that it was the practical problems that discouraged the Corporation and the Merchant Venturers, for Smeaton's scheme had not been published when they made their deal, and they had in any case been negotiating for a new wharfage lease for some years before it was finally signed. At this critical stage in the history of the port, the Society decided to settle for a relatively modest extension of the port on terms very satisfactory to itself, and it was very far from giving the imaginative leadership which might have made major improvements possible some fifty years before they actually took place.

Smeaton's plan aroused considerable interest. An alternative plan was put foward early in 1767 by the Bristolian, William Champion. It proposed to dam, not the Frome, but the Avon by erecting a dam at Redcliffe. The cost was estimated at between £30,000 and £37,000 as compared with the estimated cost of £25,000 for Smeaton's scheme. There was a good deal of controversy in Bristol about both plans, but the Society of Merchant Venturers was not interested.[20] It was busy with its own much less ambitious scheme. Under the new wharfage lease, it was committed to extending the existing quays on the Avon by making a new quay at the Grove.[21] As early as 1759, five years before the new lease was signed, it had ordered that a design should be made for a new dock there,[22] and in 1760 it paid £5 5s. to James Bridge for a survey and plan, but the Corporation's delay in signing the lease meant that nothing was done. Soon after the signing of the lease at the end of 1764, the Society ordered a survey to be made for the new quay,[23] but there was further delay. William Paty's plans were not finally approved until 25 February 1767, and the Hall then ordered that an advertisement for tenders should be printed.[24] Work began on the Grove, but in August it was reported that part of the new quay had fallen into the river during the heavy rains.[25] In November 1767, the quay wall was nearly complete, but the Grove was not finally ready until 6 November 1770.[26] The account for the quay wall and dock was £9,747 5s. 7½d.[27] If the Society had in the first place decided to make an all-out effort to back the scheme for a floating harbour, this would have made a sizeable contribution towards the cost, although the balance of the capital would have had to be raised by other means.

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[15] *H.B. 9*, 20 Sept. 1764 (12 members present), 7 Nov. 1764.

[16] Alan F. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 146 ff.

[17] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 208.

[18] Alan F. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 146 ff.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 149; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 362.

The other port improvement scheme in which the Society was involved concerned Champion's Dock, and this should be seen as an attempt by the Hall to make what it hoped would be a profitable investment rather than a disinterested effort to improve the port facilities. In 1765, William Champion had built a floating dock on the Avon near Rownham. It did not do very well, and in 1770 it was put up for auction. Some members of the Society in their private capacities made a successful bid of £2,615 for the dock and £1,420 for the houses and ground adjoining. They then offered it to the Hall, which accepted the offer and borrowed the necessary money.[28] A committee was set up to manage the property and the dock, which now became known as the Merchants' Dock. In the years that followed, the Society put a great deal of time and energy into developing its new acquisition, letting the property and planning improvements.[29] The dock had certain disadvantages, including the fact that it was some distance down the river, but the Society hit upon a clever idea to ensure that it would be used. It had been thinking for some years about the desirability of having naval stores and other combustible material off-loaded away from the heart of the city, and had argued as early as 1767 that there ought to be a special quay for such material.[30] At first, it thought that a suitable place was south of the river, opposite to Canon's Marsh, and it was prepared to offer a rent of £15 per annum for a lease of 1,000 or 2,000 years. In November 1768, it contracted for the ground for a wharf, and it intended to apply to the Treasury to make it a lawful quay.[31] However, nothing further was done, and when Champion's Dock was acquired in 1770, the Hall decided that this, rather than the Somerset side of the river, was the ideal place.[32] Again, there was delay, but in December 1775 it finally decided to apply to parliament for an Act to compel all vessels with tar, pitch, deals and combustibles to off-load on a wharf on the west side of the Merchants' Dock. The Standing Committee approved the draft bill in January 1776, and it was announced in April that it had passed both houses.[33] Plans were then made to extend the dock to meet the needs of vessels which would be legally required to off-load there. There was indeed a real danger of fire from material left on the quayside in Bristol, and the Hall was delighted that the public interest fitted in so conveniently with the private interest of the Society, which thus secured by Act of Parliament a guaranteed business for the Merchants' Dock.

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[20] For a discussion of the many different proposals put forward in the second half of the eighteenth century, with sketches showing what they involved, see Alan F. Williams, "Bristol Port Plans and Improvement Schemes", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxxi, 1962.

[21] For an admirable sketch showing the location of the various docks, quays, and ports facilities, see Alan F. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[22] *H.B. 8*, 7 Feb. 1759, 15 Oct. 1760.

[23] *H.B. 9*, 7 Nov. 1764.

[24] *H.B. 9*, 18 Feb. 1767, 25 Feb. 1767.

[25] *H.B. 9*, 7 Aug. 1767.

[26] *H.B. 9*, 15 Nov. 1768, 6 Nov. 1770.

[27] *H.B. 9*, 3 Sept. 1771.

[28] *H.B. 9*, 14 June 1770.

It is clear from the voluminous records relating to the Merchants' Dock and the adjoining property that the management of it took up a great deal of time and energy, and this may help to explain why in the seventeen-seventies and early seventeen-eighties the Society showed no interest in the idea of a floating harbour. From 1770 onwards, the committee was hard at work making plans to improve the dock, getting surveys and estimates prepared, and paying for workmen and for materials. The Treasurer's disbursements from July 1770 to August 1779 amounted to £23,547 8s. 6½d., and included £208 10s. on 30 December 1776 "for Charges of a Dinner at the Merchants Hall when the Society attended the Corporation of the City on the perambulation to that part of the parish of Clifton which was separated from the County of Gloucester and added to the said City'.[34] William Haynes' receipt book shows £2 10s. paid to William Paty on 4 May 1771 for surveying and planning, £120 paid for "a new Double Purchase Crane" on 30 October 1775; 13s. 9d. for "a Book for Registering the ships entering into the Floating Dock" purchased on 28 September 1776, and £31 10s. paid to James Paty for surveying on 3 November 1778.[35] From the very beginning, the Committee planned to enlarge the dock and recommended spending nearly £2,500 on digging it out. In November 1770 it considered two plans, one for 11 ships and one, by Richard Champion, for 16 ships, and it decided to accept Champion's proposal. Orders for further enlargement were given in 1772.[36] When it obtained the Act of 1776 making it compulsory to use the Dock for combustible materials, the Society hoped that the business would be greatly increased, and it obtained three estimates varying from £3,934 5s.3d. to £8,073 19s.[37] The enlarged Dock was ready to receive ships by May 1778, and Rules and Regulations were drawn up.[38]

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[29] The management of the Merchants' Dock produced a great deal of paper work. The records in the Hall include a volume marked *Floating Dock* which contains the Standing Committee's Reports for 1770–5, showing expenditure on plans and work done there, as well as the grant of leases of the adjoining property; a volume marked *Champions Dock 1771–1780*, which is a day by day record by William Haynes of payments for labour and materials; a volume marked *Purchase of Champions Dock* which gives details of the Treasurer's disbursements for 16 July 1770 – August 1779; a volume marked *Champions Dock Receipt Book 1771–1781* which seems to be William Haynes' receipt book for money disbursed; a bundle of papers marked "1776–Floating Dock Paty's Plans and Papers"; a volume marked *Floating Dock Ships Register 1775–6* which has only one page recording 16 ships; and *Journal No. 5 Floating Dock 1799–1807* which gives an account of ships using the dock and charges made. There are, of course, many references in the *Hall Books* and *Letters*, and there are also a large number of copies of the Floating Dock Act of 1776.

[30] *H.B. 9*, 26 Aug. 1767.

[31] *H.B. 9*, 7 Sept. 1767, 15 Nov. 1768.

[32] *H.B. 9*, 6 Nov. 1770.

[33] *H.B. 10*, 6 Dec. 1775, 16 Jan. 1776, 16 April 1776.

The management of the Floating Dock and adjoining property involved many problems, and there are innumerable references to them in the *Hall Books*. Thus, in 1781 Mr. Noble's ship was unable to get out because the water was too low. Solomon Roach reported that chips thrown into the dock from the ships collected in the mud at the gates and prevented them from closing satisfactorily.[39] From time to time, it was necessary to let out the water, clear the mud and carry out repairs.[40] In addition to the technical problems, the Society had to deal with those who evaded the terms of the Act and landed their combustible materials elsewhere. In 1787, for example, the Standing Committee was busy investigating the matter, and next year the Hall complained that the Customs Officers allowed such goods to be landed at private wharfs "to the great prejudice of the revenue of the Society". A Memorial to the Customs Office stated that "on the Faith and credit of the said Act", the Hall had spent a great deal of money and provided the necessary warehouses. It asked that such practices should cease.[41] Warnings were issued to those who evaded the Act, but it was not always easy to enforce it.[42] There was some resentment at the power which the Society had acquired to compel people to use its Dock. Thus, on 28 February 1788, four gentlemen attended the Hall to complain about excessive charges and presented a Memorial on "the General Inconveniencies which the Trade of this Port laboured under from the Restriction of the Floating Dock Act".[43] There was also the question of the Society's responsibility for pilfering at the Dock, and early in 1802 it was necessary to get counsel's opinion. It was to the effect that the Society was responsible for pilfering by its own servants but not by strangers, unless the Society could be shown to be negligent.[44]

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[34] *Purchase of Champions Dock*. The Act of 1776 brought the dock and the adjoining property, which were in Gloucestershire, into the City of Bristol.

[35] *Champions Dock Receipt Book 1771–1781*.

[36] *Floating Dock*, p. 3, 4 July 1770; p. 7, 6 Nov. 1770; p. 14, 26 March 1772.

[37] The papers in the bundle marked "1776-Floating Dock Paty's Plans and Papers" include some very fine plans, estimates for digging work, the draft of the Rules and Orders of 28 Aug. 1778 and a very neatly kept book showing expenses in connection with the river year by year from Christmas 1745 to 1776. The total, given as £58,122 6s., includes many miscellaneous terms not directly connected with the river.

[38] *H.B. 10*, 16 April 1776, 22 April 1776, 24 June 1776, 25 May 1778.

[39] *H.B. 10*, 2 May 1781.

It is not possible to say how much profit the Society made from the purchase of Champion's Dock in 1776. On the credit side must be put not only receipts from ships using the dock but also the income received from exploitation of the adjoining property, which included not only land but various workshops, including a smelting house, a saw pit, a smaller dock let to Mr. Hilhouse, and a brickyard and kiln let out in 1783 at £12 per annum, the lessee agreeing to pay the Society for the clay as he used it. It was then estimated that the clay amounted to 4,872,296 tons.[45]

The proposal to turn one or both of the rivers into a floating harbour, which had come to nothing in the seventeen-sixties, revived in the late seventeen-eighties.[46] The initiative came from a member of the Society, William Miles, who proposed at a meeting of the Hall on 20 November 1786 that it would be a great public utility if all the quays were converted into floating docks. The matter was referred to the Standing Committee.[47] There was an abnormally large attendance of 41 members at this meeting. William Miles was a comparatively new member who had been admitted for a fine of £200 in 1783. He had been chairman since its beginning in 1782 of a small but very vigorous group known as the New West India Association, and he illustrates the way in which the introduction of new blood could reinvigorate a slow-moving and conservative organisation.

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[40] *H.B. 12*, p. 8, 26 Nov. 1789 when the dock was leaking; *ibid.*, p. 43, 11 March 1790, contract to clear the mud; *ibid.*, p. 69, 24 Sept. 1790, the Standing Committee viewed the dock after cleaning; *ibid.*, p. 100, 30 Dec. 1790, the dock was leaking; *ibid.*, p. 101, 20 Jan. 1791, order for repair; *H.B. 13*, p. 22, 6 June 1797, repairs to be carried out; *ibid.*, p. 20, 16 May 1797, accepts estimate for clearing mud; *ibid.*, p. 129, 18 Feb. 1800, inspection of damage.

[41] *H.B. 11*, p. 318, 6 June 1787; pp. 391–5, 7 Feb. 1788.

[42] *H.B. 12*, pp. 241–2, 14 Nov. 1792; p. 250, 17 Jan. 1793.

[43] *H.B. 11*, pp. 397–8, 28 Feb. 1788.

[44] Society's Records: Miscellaneous Box "1802, Floating Dock. Opinion of Mr. Gibbs."

[45] *H.B. 11*, p. 20, 18 March 1783.

[46] For the long and complicated story of the Floating Harbour, see Alan F. Williams, "Bristol Port Plans and Improvement Schemes", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*,

Initially, the Standing Committee considered the possibility of reviving Smeaton's more modest plan to make the Frome into a floating harbour rather than Champion's ambitious scheme to put a dam across the Avon.[48] On 6 December 1786, the committee was informed that Mr. Vickerman, a surveyor, and a Mr. Lundberry also wished to make proposals, and it decided to ask Smeaton to name an engineer to examine the problem, and if possible to come to Bristol himself.[49] On 16 December 1786, at a General Hall at which only 17 members were present, the Standing Committee was authorised to spend up to 200 guineas on investigating the possibilities, and on 16 January 1787 Smeaton recommended Joseph Nickalls and William Jessop as possible engineers for the project.[50] The cat was now well and truly among the pigeons, and in the course of the next four years there were numerous proposals, counter-proposals, critical comments by engineers on each other's plans, and a number of estimates of the probable cost. The issue was highly controversial, and the experts were not in agreement about what to do or about how much it would cost, so there was some excuse for leisurely proceedings by those who were not technically qualified. At last, on 11 October 1791, the Standing Committee requested the Master to write to the Mayor asking for a meeting to discuss the proposals with Jessop present, and on 13 October the Standing Committee settled the State of Facts to be read to the Hall.[51]

Only 23 members of the Society were present in the Hall on 13 October 1791 when the various plans of Smeaton and Jessop were

lxxxi, 1962; R. A. Buchanan, "The Construction of the Floating Harbour in Bristol: 1804–1809", *ibid.*, lxxxviii, 1969; W. G. Neale, *At the Port of Bristol*, vol. 1, Bristol, 1968; Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, Bristol, 1909.

[47] *H.B. 11*, p. 268, 20 Nov. 1786. For Miles' admission, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 215. For the New West India Association, see pp. 237–8.

[48] *H.B. 11*, p. 270, 25 Nov. 1786.

[49] *H.B. 11*, pp. 273–4, 6 Dec. 1786. The Society's *Letter Book 1781–1816* has a great deal of correspondence about the Floating Harbour, and the bundles of letters contain many from Smeaton, Joseph Nickalls and William Jessop.

[50] *H.B. 11*, p. 287, 16 Jan. 1787.

[51] *H.B. 12*, p. 160, 13 Oct. 1791.

discussed. Nine resolutions were approved. In these, the Society agreed that the harbour of Bristol was by nature "so inferior to the natural or improved state of many others of the Ports" that the shipowners were not on an equal footing with other ports with regard to the security of their ships or the cost of loading, discharging or going to sea again, and that this led to a large annual loss. On the prosperity of the port depended in great measure "the welfare and affluence of the City of Bristol". The remedy was to erect a dam across the Avon at Redcliffe and to cut a canal in Rownham Mead, as in the plans of Smeaton and Jessop, but incorporating some of Nickall's modifications. There was every reason to think that the cost would not be greater than the advantages. There was to be a toll on the proposed bridge over the dam and a tax on shipping not exceeding the dock rates paid at Liverpool. The income from these sources would pay the interest on the capital and make it possible to create a sinking fund. The work was to be carried out for the sole advantage of the public by commissioners or trustees. The Society of Merchant Venturers had been to great expense in getting plans and estimates, with the sole view of benefiting the public. The members resolved that "they have completed all that is incumbent upon them as a separate body", but that they nevertheless considered it their duty to cooperate with the Corporation and the citizens at large in perfecting the Plan and carrying it into effect.[52]

It was, of course, quite out of question at this stage for the Society to think of making any substantial contribution to the capital cost from its own resources, for it was in fact in considerable financial difficulties.[53] It had in the last five years taken a great deal of trouble and spent about £1,000 on the work. It was, therefore, reasonable for it at this point to ask the Corporation to take over, but it was perhaps misleading of it to represent itself as "a separate body", since it enjoyed the profits of the wharfage lease which the Corporation had long since handed over to it at a nominal rent. It might well be argued that the receipts from wharfage ought to go towards the cost of any new scheme, but the wharfage lease was a piece of property which the Society had no intention of surrendering to the Corporation. It was in fact absolutely dependent on it for financial solvency.

At the end of 1791, the Corporation endorsed the Society's Statement of Facts and set up a Joint Committee of the Corporation and the Society.[54] On this the Corporation had 6 members and the

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[52] *H.B. 12*, pp. 161 ff., 13 Oct. 1791.

[53] *Supra*, pp. 117 ff.

[54] See R. A. Buchanan, "The Construction of the Floating Harbour in Bristol: 1804–1809", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxxvi, 186–7. In the Society's archives is a volume of *Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Committee of the Corporation and Society of Merchant Venturers 1792–1803*.

Society 9. It was to meet fortnightly, and two sets of minutes were to be kept.[55] The Joint Committee proceeded with slow and solemn pace for two years, but it was quick to warn intruders to keep off. When Ames, Hellicar and Sons advertised a meeting at the White Lion to open a subscription to make Canon's Marsh into a Floating Dock, the Joint Committee promptly passed a resolution that the citizens should be told that considerable progress had been made with much better plans, which would shortly be made public. With lofty disregard for the deal which they had made over wharfage, the Corporation and the Society affirmed that any schemes ought to be for the sole benefit of the public "and that no Individual or bodies of them should derive any private Emolument from them". The Corporation and the Society would strongly oppose the proposal concerning Canon's Marsh.[56]

On 12 August 1793, the Joint Committee of 5 members of the Corporation and 9 Merchant Venturers instructed the Clerk to give notice of a bill in Parliament next session. Engravings and a general plan were to be prepared, and a general explanation was to be printed.[57] In September, the cost of the scheme was estimated to be £100,000.[58]

The outbreak of war with France early in 1793 did not improve the prospects for the Floating Harbour, although it is as well to remember that the Government and the people, as is the way of the English, were confident that it would be a short war. No one dreamed that it would last, with a brief interval, until 1815. Only 14 members were present in the Hall on 21 September 1793 when the Society resolved that the improvement of the harbour was of the utmost concern and that the Society should contribute to the utmost of its ability, should the Corporation be inclined to cooperate. The Treasurer must have listened with some cynicism to the instruction given to the Standing Committee to investigate the state of the Society's finances, so that it could be judged how much could be contributed.[59] He must have felt relief when after some further discussion with Jessop in October and November,[60] nothing of any significance was done either by the Corporation or by the Society. For all practical purposes, the plan was abandoned.[61]

Latimer put the blame for the failure to improve the port on the lethargic Corporation, and stated that "the energy of the civic rulers had already evaporated . . .".[62] The Society of Merchant Venturers must certainly share the blame. In 1793, seven years had passed since one of its own members had raised the question, and although plans and estimates had been made, nothing practical had been achieved. The Society had a majority on the Joint Committee and was in a position to push matters on much more rapidly. It did not do so, and nothing at all is recorded in the Minutes of the Joint Committee between September 1793 and July 1801. The war which began in 1793 helps to explain the immediate hold-up. It brought to a halt dock proposals in London as well as in Bristol. Interest in Bristol also seems to have turned for a time to improvement of inland navigation behind Bristol with a view to forming links with the industrial areas. But war is not the complete explanation. London's plans were pushed forward from 1796 onwards and resulted in 1799 in the West India Dock Act.[63] Moreover, in the end the plan for a Floating Harbour was in fact carried out in years in which England was locked in mortal combat with Napoleon. Mr. Williams is understating the case against the Society and the Corporation when he comments "With less resolution than was displayed in London, the Bristol merchants allowed further time to pass."[64] In this matter, the Merchant Venturers were not living up to their name.

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[55] *Minutes of the Joint Committee*, pp. 1–2.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 16, 18 Dec. 1792.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20, 21, 12 Aug., 26 Aug. 1793.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 23, 16 Sept. 1793.

[59] *H.B. 12*, p. 297, 21 Sept. 1793.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 304, 23 Oct. 1793; p. 309, 8 Nov. 1793 when only 12 members were present.

[61] For resumption of the plan in the early nineteenth century, see pp. 307ff.

The Society's responsibilities for the port were not, of course, limited to the provision and maintenance of quays and docks. It continued to exercise general control over the harbour and river though the Havenmaster, whom it appointed, subject to approval by the Corporation, and it paid his salary. It gave the office to John Homer in 1700, but in 1727 it suspended him as a result of complaints. It soon restored him, but it deducted a quarter's salary on account of his frequent neglect of duty, and a committee was instructed to draw up rules and regulations for the office.[65] Homer died two years later, and was replaced by Abraham Lewis.[66] In 1755, the Hall appointed Captain Hollister to the post.[67] In 1781, it was decided that the Havenmaster should be subject to annual re-election, and this proposal was evidently highly contentious, for it was carried by only 24 votes to 23.[68]

Another port official appointed by the Society, subject to approval by the Corporation, was the Ballast Master. By 1759, this office had been combined with that of the Havenmaster.[69]

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[62] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 214.

[63] See Alan F. Williams, "Bristol Port Plans and Improvement Schemes", *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, lxxxi, 1962, pp. 171–3.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[65] *H.B.* 5, 14 July 1727, 19 Sept. 1727.

[66] *H.B.* 5, 19 May 1729.

[67] *H.B.* 7, 10 Aug. 1752. For the list of Havenmasters during the rest of the century, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 201.

[68] *H.B.* 10, 13 Dec. 1781. John Shaw was then appointed.

There are some indications that the system was not working satisfactorily in the last decade of the century. In 1794, the Town Clerk sent to the Society the orders of Quarter Sessions concerning the duties of the Havenmaster and Ballast Master, and these were copied into the Hall Book.[70] Three years later, the Standing Committee itself reported at length on the duties of the offices and recommended that the Havenmaster's post should be full-time, that he should have a house near Hungroad, and that he should employ an assistant. It said that this would require an increase in salary.[71] The Hall approved an addition of £30 a year, and out of three applicants, William Tomlinson was appointed by a majority vote.[72]

In addition to appointing these officers, the Society also controlled the cranes, and its monopoly was of increasing value as trade expanded in the course of the century. The cranes involved capital expenditure and maintenance,[73] but there were very satisfactory returns. For the greater part of the century, the cranes were leased for a term of years, often by public auction, and the Society did not have the bother of running them itself.[74] Thus, in 1740 Mr. Corsley Rogers took, for a period of 7 years at £162 per annum, the crane and dock formerly let to Mr. Hilhouse.[75] In 1748, the Great Crane and Dock, the little crane on the other side of the dock, the crane at the lower end of the quay and another next to it were let for £176 per annum, and two others were let at £41 and £31.[76] In 1758, seven cranes were leased at a total rent of £652,[77] and three years later a new crane was let at £80.[78] Nine cranes put up for auction in 1765 produced £988 per annum.[79]

Eventually, the Society decided that it would be more profitable if it managed the cranes itself. It took them into its own hands as an experiment in 1772 and appointed a Crane Master at £50 per annum.[80] It maintained this arrangement for the rest of the century, although it is not clear that it was as satisfactory financially as the practice of leasing.[81] There was a certain amount of trouble with the staff of the Crane Office and difficulty in collecting the money, as well as disputes about the rates charged by the Society.[82]

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[69] *H.B. 8*, 13 Sept. 1759.

[70] *H.B. 12*, p. 318, 8 Jan. 1794, p. 321 ff., pp. 325 ff.

[71] *H.B. 13*, pp. 1–3, 30 Jan. 1797.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 6, 30 Jan. 1797; p. 12, 18 April 1797.

[73] There are many references in the *Hall Books* of which the following are examples: *H.B. 3*, 18 Dec. 1701, 2 new-built cranes let at £48 p.a.; *H.B. 4*, 3 July 1718, order to erect 1 or more cranes; *H.B. 5*, 18 June 1733, cranes and docks to be leased at £110; *H.B. 6*, 18 Oct. 1740, 80 guineas paid for a ready-made crane; *H.B. 6*, 2 April 1741, two new cranes erected, and another planned; *H.B. 7*, 12 March 1750, crane to be erected at the lower end of the quay, opposite to the Three Tuns; *H.B. 8*, 7 Jan. 1761, crane to be erected on the west point of the Gibb slip; *H.B. 10*, 16 April 1773, crane no. 9 to be taken down and a new one erected; *H.B. 12*, p. 75, 4 Oct. 1790, the Standing Committee to consider new cranes.

[74] See the Society's deeds, Box 6, bdle. B. for the various leases.

[75] *H.B. 6*, 23 Oct. 1740.

[76] *H.B. 7*, 23 March 1748.

[77] *H.B. 8*, 25 March 1758.

[78] *H.B. 8*, 20 July 1761.

[79] *H.B. 9*, 4 Feb. 1765, 11 March 1765.

Those using the port also came in contact with another of the Society's officers, the Collector of Wharfage. As we have seen, the right of collecting these duties had been leased to the Society, and since this was a major source of income, the Society made sure that it was paid by those who did not belong to the Society. The collectors or receivers were men of some substance who worked on a percentage basis and presumably appointed underlings to do the actual work. In general, the Society's right seems to have been accepted, but there were on occasions signs of resistance. Thus in 1774, Cruger and Mallard objected to particular charges, and the Society feared that resistance might spread.[83] In 1779, when David Lewis refused to pay in two instances, the Clerk was asked to state a case on the Society's title.[84] There was more trouble in 1788 and 1789 when the Society considered trying to enforce by legal action or otherwise its right to collect the duty on goods landed at private docks.[85]

There is an interesting letter on the subject of wharfage written by the Society's former Clerk, Samuel Worrall, to the Master, Mr. Hobhouse, on 12 December 1788.[86] Worrall stated that in 1781 a trader had refused to pay wharfage duty. On examining the case, Worrall had some doubts about the wisdom of bringing an action and did not do so. He had obtained counsel's opinion and this made him think it would be in the interests of the Society "to let the whole business drop into oblivion". He consulted the Town Clerk. Sir Abraham Elton also joined him in thinking it prudent to let the matter drop. Worrall claimed that in order that the business "might not raise an alarm", he had not sent in a bill to the Society. Now he was closing his account, and he was reluctant to raise the matter in

[80] *H.B. 9*, 25 Jan. 1772, 11 March 1772.

[81] In the *Treasurer's Journal 1795–1807*, the income from the cranes is put at £242 and the capital value at 16 years' purchase at £3,872. This may, of course, be an under-valuation.

[82] *H.B. 11*, p. 174, 5 Sept. 1785, the clerk and collector of the crane office were dismissed; p. 176, 10 Sept. 1785, James Whitchurch appointed Chief Clerk of the Crane office at £100 a year. For difficulties over collecting the money, *H.B. 10*, 15 Nov. 1773; *H.B. 11*, pp. 103–4, 3 Nov. 1785; for disputes about the rates charged, *H.B. 10*, 31 Oct. 1775, 3 Nov. 1777, 26 July 1780.

[83] *H.B. 10*, 12 Feb. 1774, 24 Oct. 1775.

[84] *H.B. 10*, 11 Feb. 1779.

[85] *H.B. 11*, p. 440, 5 July 1788; p. 524, 26 Aug. 1789.

[86] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 29, 12 Dec. 1788, Worrall to Hobhouse.

case it opened a wound injurious to the interests of the Society, but he could not serve the Society at a loss. He said he had no doubt about the right to the duty, but that embarrassment had been caused by the conduct of the Receivers of Wharfage, who had been very culpable. It rather looks as though Worrall was trying to induce the Society to pay the bill by hinting that it would be embarrassed if the question of its right was raised publicly. The city had undoubtedly granted the right to collect wharfage to the Society, but probably neither the Society nor the Corporation wanted the matter raised in a court. The Corporation's own right to port dues had been challenged in the past and was in fact to be challenged again in the future.

It was fortunate for the Society that there was no really serious questioning of the wharfage duties in this period. If there had been, the Society would no doubt have defended its position by pointing out that it performed a number of services for the port for which it received no payment, in particular the conservation of the river and the supervision of pilotage.

Conservation of the river was ultimately the responsibility of the Corporation, but, as we have seen, the Society took on the work in the seventeenth century, and it continued it in the eighteenth.[87] It was continually concerned with such matters as removing rocks,[88] dealing with sandbanks,[89] providing mooring posts and mooring chains,[90] repairing the banks and keeping the towing paths clear,[91] looking after the deep-water anchorages at Hungroad and Kingroad, and taking steps to deal with vessels sunk in the river.[92]

The Havenmaster kept the Society informed about what was going on and was himself kept informed by the pilots, and the Standing Committee on occasions went down the river to Hungroad on a tour of inspection.[93] Among the Society's records is a very neatly-kept book showing expenses in connection with the river from 1745 to 1776.[94] The items include labour for throwing mud into the river and cleaning the quays, which in 1745–6 amounted to £145 19s. 10d; expenses in 1746–7 of £105 for endeavouring to remove the *Somerset Privateer*, sunk in the channel; and £26 5s. for a survey of the Avon in 1764–5.

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[87] There are very many references to this work in the *Hall Books* and other records. Only a few illustrations need be given here.

[88] For example, *H.B. 4*, 24 June 1708: Committee to inspect the Frome and Avon and to empty boats and men to take up stones; *ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1715. River to be cleared of stones and other annoyance. Rocks at St. Augustine's to be dug and made low, *H.B. 12*, p. 358, 1 Jan. 1795: 300 tons of stones to be removed from the ledger rock.

[89] For example, *H.B. 7*, 25 Aug. 1746: sandbank near Clevedon to be marked with buoys; *H.B. 8*, 10 March 1760, the havenmaster and pilots to report on a large and dangerous sandbank 1½ miles from Kingroad.

[90] For example, *H.B. 12*, p. 120, 28 March 1791.

[91] For example, *H.B. 10*, 9 Feb. 1778: the Havenmaster reports the breaches in the banks endangering cattle used to haul ships from Hungroad to Kingroad (which must be done when the wind blows from the north-east).

[92] For example, *H.B. 7*, 14 Aug. 1750: two men sent to look at the *Falcon*, sunk in the mouth of the river; *H.B. 13*, p. 8, 17 Feb. 1797, to remove a lighter sunk in the river.

[93] For example, *H.B. 10*, 18 Nov. 1772; *H.B. 11*, p. 43, 1 July 1783.

The number of nuisances in the river was apparently increasing in the second half of the century. Stones from the quarries and industrial spoil from the glasshouses and other works gave a good deal of trouble. The Society endeavoured to insist that proper stanks were made to prevent rocks from the quarries falling into the river, and at one time employed a nightwatchman to prevent rubble being thrown in near the Hotwell.[95]

The Society was beginning to find the burden very heavy in the last part of the century when it was in financial difficulty and when the volume of complaints was growing. In June 1791, the Corporation established its own committee to enquire into nuisances, obstructions and impediments on the Avon, Frome and Severn, and the Society stated that it was happy to learn that the Corporation was taking action to remove nuisances.[96] It was the first step on a road which was in due course to lead to the end of the control of the port by the Merchant Venturers.

Responsibility for the pilots continued to be delegated by the Corporation to the Hall, which arranged for the examination of suitable candidates and then issued certificates which successful applicants took to the Mayor and the Aldermen.[97] Licenses had to be renewed annually, and the Society took bonds from the pilots for the proper discharge of their duties.[98] The Society drew up regulations from time to time and also exercised its influence over wage rates.[99] It was on the watch for any combination among pilots, and in 1786, for example, it drew the attention of the Corporation to the articles entered into by the pilots, which seemed very mischievous.[100]

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[94] See note 37, *supra*.

[95] For example, *H.B. 9*, 18 April 1770, complaint about the waste from the glasshouses near Canon's Marsh; *ibid.*, 5 April 1769, complaint about mud and rubble from Champion's Dock; *H.B. 12*, p. 100, 30 Dec. 1790, stanks to be made for the quarries; p. 101, nightwatchman to be employed at Hotwells.

[96] For the Corporation's Committee, see Bristol Record Office: *River Committee Book 1791–1826* (04 289 (1–9)).

[97] For the eighteenth-century pilots, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 193–9. He gives a list of all pilots approved by the Society in this period.

[98] Among the Society's records is a bundle of 94 bonds marked 1684 to 1783. Only one of them is before 1719.

[99] See, for example, *H.B. 4*, 26 March 1719; *H.B. 9*, 4 Feb. 1765; *H.B. 10*, 4 Aug. 1779; *H.B. 11*, p. 49, 28 Oct. 1783; *ibid.*, p. 82, 20 Sept. 1784; *H.B. 12*, p.30, 20 Jan. 1790.

[100] *H.B. 11*, p. 278, 20 Dec. 1786.

The pilots themselves were naturally anxious to restrict their numbers, but the merchants, as employers, were not always sympathetic to such demands.[101]

The Society carefully examined complaints about damage or loss resulting from inefficiency or carelessness, and those found guilty were suspended or recommended for dismissal. Thus in 1775, a drunken pilot who brought up a ship at night and refused to put it where the quay warden told him and who "declared he would be key warden for that Night" was suspended from duty,[102] and in 1791 a pilot who broke a ship on the Ness Sands through obstinacy and ignorance was recommended to be broken as an example to others.[103] There are many other examples of disciplinary action, and, as far as one can judge, investigations were carried out with efficiency and understanding of the problems involved. A careful eye was also kept on pilots' charges, and on numerous occasions complaints were examined and the bills confirmed or amended.[104]

An attempt was made to see that pilots were properly equipped for their work. Thus, in 1746 the Hall insisted that they must provide themselves with tow boats,[105] and in 1773 the Standing Committee required that all tow boats, yawls and skiffs should be numbered and should have their names in white Roman letters 3″ long on a black background on the most conspicuous part of the ship. The Havenmaster was to keep a record.[106] From time to time, the Standing Committee went down to Lamplighters' Hall at Shirehampton to examine the pilots and to make its authority felt. On one occasion, the pilots had to be rebuked for being drunk and fighting in front of the Committee.[107]

Although the Corporation was normally willing to leave pilotage in the Society's care, it occasionally asserted its authority. Thus, when the Clerk went to the Council House with a certificate about the unsatisfactory conduct of the pilot James Thayer in 1785, the Mayor and Aldermen took exception to the decision and ordered that the case should be brought before them. They then found it not proved, and ordered that Thayer should be reinstated.[108] There was also a suggestion at one time that the Society was not carrying out its duties efficiently. In a letter which the Mayor wrote to the Hall in 1797, he gave a list of pilots who were aged or infirm or who were without proper equipment. He suggested that the Society should consider cooperating with the Corporation in providing pensions for the good old men and that young men should be appointed in their place.[109] Possibly the Society was too easy-going. When the Standing Committee examined the branch pilots at Lamplighters' Hall in 1800, it found that some were deaf, one had rheumatism, one had gout, one was intoxicated and another was suffering from nervous disorder. On that occasion, it took steps to appoint suitable men in their place.[110]

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[101] *H.B. 6*, 5 March 1734 when the application by the Pill pilots to restrict the number to 24 was rejected. See also *H.B. 11*, p. 433, 5 June 1788 when 42 pilots petitioned that there should be no new admissions.

[102] *H.B. 10*, 20 Sept. 1775.

[103] *H.B. 12*, pp. 166–7, 27 Oct. 1791.

[104] See, for example, *H.B. 11*, p. 85, 6 Oct. 1784; *ibid.*, p. 92, 3 Nov. 1784, *H.B. 12*, pp. 102–4, 30 Jan. 1791.

[105] *H.B. 7*, 25 Aug. 1746. The order was repeated from time to time and was not always obeyed. In 1788, for example, the Havenmaster was ordered to return a list of those without tow boats and yawls. Licences of offenders were not to be renewed (*H.B. 11*, p. 462, 16 Oct. 1788).

[106] *H.B. 10*, 18 May 1773. The order was repeated in 1793 (*H.B. 12*, p. 290, 12 July 1793) and in 1800 (*H.B. 13*, p. 162, 19 Nov. 1800). For pilots without tow boats, see *H.B. 8*, 17 Oct. 1758.

[107] *H.B. 12*, p. 311, 8 Nov. 1793.

The Society's interest in the safety of merchant ships also involved it at times with lighthouses and with harbour improvements in other places. In these matters, its concern for navigation was sometimes reinforced by its desire to see that Bristol ships did not have to pay excessive fees to those who made improvements.

The need for a lighthouse on Flat Holm near the mouth of the Avon was of special interest to the Hall. In 1728, it passed a resolution in favour of it and set up a committee to enquire into the cost and to provide buoys there.[111] The matter was still under consideration in 1733. In March 1735, the Standing Committee approved a proposal of Mr. Crispe to build a lighthouse on Flat Holm at his own expense and to charge 1½d. a ton on foreign ships and 1d. a ton on coasters passing the light, but a General Hall on 9 May disapproved of the charges. Agreement was eventually reached with Crispe on 19 March 1737, and on 25 March the Standing Committee fixed the Hall seal to the agreement and arranged to petition Trinity House. On 20 June, the Standing Committee was instructed to fix the precise spot for the lighthouse.[112]

In 1760, Robert Nugent asked for the Society's opinion about a proposed lighthouse on Grasholm Island and was told that the Hall had no objection, provided the toll was charged only on ships going to and from Ireland on the northward passage.[113] When the Society was asked to support a petition for an Irish lighthouse in 1767, the Standing Committee agreed to do so, provided the toll was charged only on ships that actually passed the lighthouse.[114]

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[108] *H.B. 11*, p. 140, 6 May 1785; p. 142, 14 May 1785; p. 153, 11 June 1785; p. 186, 7 Nov. 1785. Perhaps James Thayer had friends in high places. See also *H.B. 11*, p. 449, 22 Aug. 1788.

[109] *H.B. 13*, p. 41, 21 Dec. 1797. There had been an earlier proposal by the Society that it should confer with the Corporation about a superannuation fund and a sickness fund for pilots. (*H.B. 12*, p. 360, 1 Jan. 1795.)

[110] *H.B. 13*, p. 143, 8 July 1800; p. 146, 22 July 1800; p. 147, 29 July 1800.

[111] *H.B. 5*, 15 March 1728. The matter had been discussed in 1702. See Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 206; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 42, 47; W. R. Chaplin, "The History of Flatholm Lighthouse", *The American Neptune*, xx, 1960.

[112] *H.B. 6*, 11 March 1735, 9 May 1735, 19 March 1737, 25 March 1737, 20

It was not so sympathetic to a proposal by John Philips of Liverpool in 1775 to build a lighthouse on the rocks known as the Smalls in St. George's Channel. In its petition, it questioned whether the lighthouse was practicable, asked for exemption from tolls for ships not in fact making use of the light, and requested that tolls should be reasonable.[115] Liverpool asked Bristol to support its opposition, and the Society sent two representatives to London. Lancaster and Glasgow also joined in, and after a sharp fight in the Commons, the bill was defeated.[116] When the scheme was revived in 1778, the Society again went to considerable lengths in opposing it. It sent a petition to the Commons and prepared one for the Lords, and it carried on a considerable correspondence with the M.P.s and others who were interested. The bill, however, had the backing of Trinity House and the Government, and it went through Parliament. The bundle of letters relating to the Smalls Lighthouse in the Society's records is an interesting illustration of the immense amount of trouble it could take, even over relatively minor matters.[117]

The Society also showed interest in a proposal to place lights on long ships at Land's End and the Wolf Rocks, and it decided that a meeting of all interested parties should be held in the Hall. The meeting reported that the lights would be beneficial to coastal trade and to trade from Bristol to the Mediterranean, but that ships using certain routes ought to be exempt from tolls.[118] In 1791, the Standing Committee received a report about proposed lights on the Goodwin Sands and decided it needed further information.[119] Four years later, it discussed a bill proposing to extend the range of places liable for a charge for the use of the Mumbles Light. It said it would be ready to listen to arguments from the proposers, but after hearing

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June 1737. In 1748 when the Light was up for auction, the Society considered making a bid (*H.B. 7*, 20 Oct. 1748).

[113] *H.B. 8*, 27 Feb. 1760.

[114] *H.B. 9*, 19 Oct. and 26 Oct. 1767.

[115] The petition of 9 March 1775 is printed in Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 132–5.

[116] *H.B. 10*, 24 April 1775; Minchinton *Politics and the Port*, . 133.

[117] *H.B. 10*, 23 Feb. 1778. The bundle dealing with the Smalls Lighthouse contains a number of letters on the subject from Burke and Cruger. In a letter of 31 March 1775, Burke explained that on the previous occasion, it had been a private matter but that it now had the backing of Trinity House and a powerful Admiralty interest. For the petitions, see Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 146–7.

[118] *H.B. 12*, p. 54, 28 June 1790; p. 55, 29 July 1790.

[119] *H.B. 12*, p. 147, 9 Sept. 1791.

Mr. Morgan for the bill, it decided to oppose it.[120] The next year, it considered the Swansea Light Bill and made a number of criticisms which it sent to the Corporation to use in amending or opposing the bill.[121]

Harbours in other ports were of concern on a number of occasions. In 1765, the Hall agreed to help, to the extent of 100 guineas, a plan to make Barry Island a safe harbour by removing certain rocks, but the grant was conditional on Bristol ships being free from any duty for anchorage.[122] It was less enthusiastic about plans to improve Ramsgate harbour, for which an Act had been secured in 1749, and in 1754 it forwarded its criticisms to the Trustees. On this issue, the Society seems to have been in disagreement with some other Bristolians who forwarded a petition in support of the scheme to the House of Lords in 1756.[123] Later, in 1777, the Society received complaints from several merchants about the demands made by the Trustees of Ramsgate Harbour and Dover and Rye Piers. The complaints were referred to the Standing Committee, but no further action seems to have been taken.[124] Earlier on, objection had been taken to a bill to impose duties on ships passing between Dover and Calais, and the M.P.s had been asked to oppose it.[125] In the last decade of the century, a request for support was received from some gentlemen of St. Agnes, Cornwall, who wanted to make a pier. It was agreed to ask the Bristol M.P.s to back the proposal. When Hull wanted support for its harbour bill in 1794, the Society decided to ask for more details.[126]

Considered in themselves, the Society's achievements were of great value. It is difficult to believe that the eighteenth-century Corporation would have done so well if it had chosen to undertake the work itself. The Society did not give its services for nothing, and the wharfage lease and the control of the cranes brought in a considerable income, but, judged at least by eighteenth-century standards, it gave value for money, although it must be remembered that in developing the port, it was furthering the immediate interests of its own members as well as those of the citizens at large. The main criticism must be that it did not supply the initiative and the drive necessary to put Bristol into a position to compete effectively with more favourably-placed rivals, and that in the seventeen-sixties in effect it helped to obstruct schemes for turning the river into a floating harbour.

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[120] *H.B. 12*, p. 368, 23 March 1795; p. 370, 26 March 1795; pp. 376–7, 30 March 1795; p. 392, 6 July 1795. [121] *H.B.* 12, p. 432, 14 March 1796; 12 April 1796.

[122] *H.B. 9*, 14 Jan. 1765. [123] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 80, 81.

[124] *H.B. 10*, 4 Nov. 1777. For later complaints see *H.B. 12*, p. 129, 30 April 1791, and p. 137, 16 June 1791.

[125] *H.B. 9*, 6 March 1769. For later complaints, see *ibid.*, 2 April 1772.

[126] *H.B. 12*, p. 282, 25 May 1793; *ibid.*, p. 328, 18 Feb. 1794.

CHAPTER 10

The Society in Wartime in the Eighteenth Century

IN the frequent wars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, British ships were at risk, and the Society was concerned to see that they received adequate protection. The *Hall Books* and correspondence are full of references to this major activity, the importance of which has not always been fully appreciated.[1]

In 1702, even before the War of the Spanish Succession had broken out, the Society wrote to "our parliament men" urging them to apply for two convoys in event of hostilities, and also enquiring whether "easier and cheaper ways" could be found to procure letters of marque.[2] In 1707, the Hall expressed its thanks to Sir John Duddlestone, one of its members and an M.P. for Bristol, for procuring a convoy, and it sent a gross of wine to Captain Steward of H.M.S. *Garland* when he came to take care of the Virginia fleet.[3] When peace was signed in 1713, the protection of shipping still remained a matter of concern, and on a number of occasions the Hall had to take steps to protect merchants and ship-owners against depredations by the Spanish and by the semi-piratical states of North Africa.[4]

During the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8), the Society had a particularly important role to play. When H.M.S. *Sapphire* arrived in Bristol in March 1742 with orders to protect the trade of the port, the Standing Committee was informed that the captain was to be "under the directions of the Merchants of this City with respect to his cruising. . . ." and that the Committee, "being the representative body of the Society of Merchants in this City . . ."

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[1] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 203 ff. has some reference to it in the middle years of the century, but he did not stress its importance in all the wars of the period. See also Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxviii–xxix, 60–5.

[2] *H.B. 3*, 15 Jan. and 22 Jan. 1702. Privateering was an important activity in Bristol in the eighteenth century (see J. W. Damer Powell, *Bristol Privateers and Ships of War*, Bristol, 1930). The Society was not involved in it as a corporate body, but some of its members engaged in it. Hence the enquiry about cheaper letters of marque.

[3] *H.B. 3*, 24 Oct. 1707.

[4] See pp. 139, 221, 238, and Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxviii–xxix.

was to issue the instructions.[5] For the rest of the war, the Hall continually issued orders about convoys to captains of His Majesty's ships stationed at Bristol.[6] In addition, the Society also maintained contact with the Bristol M.P.s and with the Admiralty about protection for merchant ships in other parts of the world. Thus, in 1744 it petitioned for men-of-war to be stationed off the coast of Africa,[7] and from time to time, either on its own or in conjunction with other ports such as London and Liverpool, it asked for convoys for the Jamaican and African trades.[8]

The importance of this part of the Society's work probably reached its maximum in the Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763, when numerous references in the *Hall Books* and letters bear witness to the extent of its operations and the very close liaison it maintained with the Admiralty, either directly or through the Bristol M.P.s. Even before the commencement of hostilities, it was in touch with Robert Nugent, asking that two ships of 40 to 50 guns should be provided,[9] and throughout the war it issued a stream of directives about convoys to His Majesty's ships in Bristol.[10]

The Admiralty was hard-pressed, for there were many demands to provide ships and men, but it seems to have regarded sympathetically the requests from Bristol and to have treated the views of the Society with respect. The Hall was torn between the need to provide men for the merchant service and the demands of the Royal Navy for men in time of war. It did its best to help the Admiralty, and on one occasion at least it made an arrangement by which the Admiralty provided two ships of 32 guns and 22 guns, and the Hall undertook to provide the crews of 190 and 135 men for them. It stipulated that the men should be employed only in the service of Bristol trade "unless in cases of the greatest emergency . . .".[11] The Society made arrangements to hire a vessel on which to keep the pressed men until the men-of-war arrived.[12]

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[5] *H.B. 6*, 29 March 1742. Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 203, seems to have thought that what he called "this remarkable devolution of power on the part of the Government" first occurred in the Seven Years' War (1756–63).

[6] The following are a few illustrations from the many references in the *Hall Books*: *H.B. 6*, 30 Dec. 1742 (to H.M.S. *Port Mahon*); 20 April 1745 (to the *Mary Galley*); *H.B. 7*, 26 Nov. 1747 (to the *Prince Edward*); *ibid.*, 1 April 1748 (to the *Hardwicke*).

[7] *H.B. 6*, 2 April 1744; *Book of Charters 2*, p. 289, 2 April 1744; *ibid.*, p. 292.

[8] For example, *H.B. 6*, 18 Feb. 1745, 25 Feb. 1745; *H.B. 7*, 16 Oct. 1746, 11 Dec. 1747, 10 Feb. 1748; *Book of Charters 2*, p. 296, 23 Nov. 1745.

[9] *H.B. 8*, 6 Sept. 1755.

[10] See, for example, *H.B. 8*, 26 May 1756; 12 Aug. 1756; 12 Sept. 1757; 23 Nov. 1757; 21 Jan. 1758; 13 Dec. 1758; 6 Jan. 1759; 16 Feb. 1761; 7 April 1762; 6 Nov. 1762. The bundles of letters relating to this period include many from the Admiralty and from Robert Nugent, M.P. as well as from the commanders of the ships.

[11] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 4, 23 Feb. 1759, from the Admiralty. See also bdle. 4, 6 Feb. 1759 (Nugent to Casamajor); 29 Jan. 1759 (same to same); 1 March 1749 (Capt. Nash to Henry Cruger stating that he is ready to receive the men).

The merchants in general realised that their best hope of getting help from the Admiralty was through the Society. Thus, in 1757, Mr. James Macartney, who was not a Merchant Venturer, wrote to the Master stating that many ships were bound from Cork to Barbados, the Leeward Islands and Jamaica and asked him to get the Admiralty to provide a convoy.[13] Naval captains were also aware that the Society was influential in high places. When Captain Penny of the *Looe* found that it was taking a very long time to get his ship repaired in the naval dockyard, he asked the Society to write to the Admiralty to hasten matters, and this was done.[14] On another occasion, the Hall, through the good offices of Robert Nugent, was able to persuade the Admiralty to change its original orders and to allow the naval escort to go much further out to sea than had originally been intended.[15]

Not all convoy work was carried out efficiently by the navy, and when Captain Scott of the *Humber* was accused by the merchant navy captains of failing to do his duty by the Virginia fleet, the Society joined with the Londoners in complaining to the Admiralty and instructed its Clerk to collect evidence from the captains. On the other hand, the Hall was ready to reward virtue. In 1758, for example, 100 guineas was voted to Captain Saumarez of the *Antelope*, who attacked and captured a French man-of-war of 64 guns in the Bristol Channel,[16] and when Captain Man of the *Milford* was killed in action, the Hall took it on itself to recommend to the Admiralty the promotion of Captain William Hamilton, the Regulating Captain in Bristol.[17]

The outbreak of the struggle with the American colonies in 1776 constituted yet another threat to English merchant shipping, and there were heavy losses. The situation became even more desperate when the formidable French navy gave support to the rebels from 1778 onwards. Once again, a heavy responsibility rested on the Hall, and the Society's records bear witness to the considerable effort it made to protect merchant shipping. The Navy Board was authorised by the Admiralty to hire an armed vessel of at least 20 guns to protect coastal convoys, provided the towns in question raised the men, and it asked the Society whether it knew of any merchants willing to lend their vessels. George Cranfield Berkeley offered to take command of the vessel and to procure the men at his own expense.[18] The Society assisted recruitment by promising to give an additional bounty to the men, on condition that the Corporation shared the cost and that the men so raised were not pressed for the Royal Navy.[19]

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[12] *H.B. 8*, 23 Jan. 1759; 12 Feb. 1759; 26 Feb. 1759; 3 March 1759; 11 April 1759; 13 Nov. 1759, and other references.

[13] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 3, 22 Dec. 1757.

[14] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 6, 27 Feb. 1761, Capt. Penny to the Hall; *H.B. 8*, 16 Feb. 1761, 27 April 1761.

[15] *H.B. 8*, 8 Nov. 1756.

[16] *H.B. 8*, 7 Nov. 1758.

[17] *H.B. 8*, 5 April 1762. It also recommended a man to be his second lieutenant.

In September 1777, the Master reported that the Liverpool coasters had permission to carry guns, and the Hall decided to write to Edmund Burke to get the same permission for Bristol.[20] As in the earlier war, there was a great deal of correspondence with the M.P.s and the Admiralty about convoys, and merchants and captains channelled their requests through the Society. Thus, when the Admiralty gave instructions in 1779 that Bristol ships bound for Canada should join the convoy assembling at Spithead, the Hall received a request from four merchants that the convoy should arrange to pick up their ships at Scilly. This was passed on by the Hall to Burke, who reported that the Admiralty thought the suggestion impracticable.[21] There was also cooperation between Bristol and other ports. Thus, in 1781 the Committee of Trade of the port of Lancaster asked the Society to support a petition for ships to cruise in St. George's Channel to protect the homeward-bound West Indian fleet.[22]

The Admiralty and the captains of the Royal Navy stationed at Bristol seem to have done their best to meet the requests of the Society, and on a number of occasions the Hall issued instructions direct to the navy. In 1779, for example, the Admiralty acknowledged a letter from the Society which stated that the captain of the *Three Brothers* had not yet received his orders to convoy Bristol ships. Another copy was enclosed, and the Society was told it could deliver it direct to Captain Barker.[23]

The merchant captains did not always cooperate satisfactorily with the convoy masters. On one occasion, the captain of the convoy reported sharply to the Society that on the date fixed by the Society, only one ship came for instructions, and so he had refused to sail.

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[18] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 20, 11 Aug. 1777, from Henry Hamilton; 21 Aug. 1777, from Richard Champion concerning Berkeley's offer. It is not clear whether the Society accepted the offer.

[19] *H.B. 10*, 13 Aug. 1777.

[20] *H.B. 10*, 8 Sept. 1777.

[21] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 22, 5 April 1779, from the Admiralty; 9 April 1779, from the four merchants; 16 April 1779, from Burke. For other requests see bdle. 22, 22 April 1779, from the owners of ships bound for Quebec; also letters of 9 April and 22 May 1779.

[22] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 23, 1 June 1781; see also *H.B. 11*, p. 9, 7 Jan. 1783.

[23] *H.B. 10*, 13 Sept. 1779. For other examples of orders to naval captains, see *H.B. 10*, 28 Feb. 1780; 14 April 1781; 19 June 1781; 21 July 1781; 11 Aug. 1781; *H.B. 11*, 23 Nov. 1782; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 23, 19 June 1781 (the *Three Brothers*); bdle. 25, 5 Dec. 1782, from the captain of the *Royal Charlotte*.

In future, he would not go anywhere unless positively informed of the number of ships ready to sail, as the Admiralty did not mean men-of-war to run from port to port without a proper number of vessels.[24]

The role of the Society in organising Bristol-based convoys seems to have been rather less important in the War of American Independence than it had been in the War of the Austrian Succession and in the Seven Years' War, and towards the end of the American War, the work of pressing the Admiralty to provide convoys seems to have been taken over, at least in some measure, by the New West India Association, which was very active in the matter and which dealt direct with the Admiralty.[25]

In the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, which lasted from 1793 to 1815 and which involved naval activity on a vast scale, the Society was still concerned with convoys from time to time,[26] but its interest was not nearly so marked as in earlier conflicts. Although on at least one occasion a Bristol-based royal navy ship was placed at the disposal of the Society,[27] this was not normal practice, as it had been earlier. Much more concern about convoys seems to have been shown by the West India Association, whose *Book of Proceedings* shows it regularly in touch with the Admiralty and the M.P.s during the war years. In this, as in other respects, the Society in the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth century seems to have lost some of its vitality and to have been content to leave to others work which it had formerly carried out with great energy itself.

In wartime, the merchants wanted large numbers of ships of the royal navy to protect their commerce, but service in the navy was not popular with merchant seamen, and the activities of the press gangs not only deprived the merchant navy of many of its own men but frightened seamen into going to ground in order to avoid being pressed. The Society had to try to keep a balance between conflicting demands.

In every war, the activities of the press gangs disturbed the supply of seamen, and the Hall did what it could to mitigate the hardships and to protest against the abuses of a system without which the royal navy could not be maintained at full strength. Thus, in 1706, when H.M.S. *Lizard* pressed men out of the *Resolution* and did not replace them, a committee of the Hall was instructed to inquire into "this hard usage".[28] In 1758, there were complaints about the pressing of men 70 to 80 leagues west of Scilly. This was alleged to have prevented ships from Jamaica from getting back to Kingroad before the wind changed and to have resulted in the loss of the *Queen Elizabeth.* The Master was instructed to complain to the Admiralty.[29] In 1778, when Bristol shipowners and merchants asked for protection against the press gangs for their men who were employed on privateers, the Standing Committee took the matter up with Edmund Burke.[30] Among the complaints which the Society received about the pressing of men was a lengthy one received in 1790 from the captain of the *Hope.* He alleged that 11 of his men had been pressed by H.M.S. *Hyaena* as his ship was waiting to go up the river to Bristol, that the captain of the *Hyaena* had refused to let her proceed until the pressed men's wages had been paid, and that musket shots had been fired at his ship. The Society complained to the Admiralty, and Captain Aylmer of the *Hyaena* was reprimanded.[31]

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[24] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 23, 25 June 1781, the Master of the *Three Brothers* to the Society. See also bdle. 23, 23 Dec. 1782, when the captain of the *Royal Charlotte* complained that only two ships had reported to him.

[25] *Book of Proceedings of the West India Association 1782–1834* (in the Merchants' Hall), 4 June 1782, 9 Oct. 1782, 26 Oct. 1782. For the New West India Association, see p. 238.

[26] See, for example, *H.B. 12*, p. 262, 19 Feb. 1793; *ibid.*, pp. 374–5, 30 March 1795; p. 403, 26 Oct. 1795; p. 409, 6 Nov. 1795; p. 417, 17 Nov. 1795; p. 422, 26 Dec. 1795; p. 426, 6 Jan. 1796; p. 428, 25 Feb. 1796; *H.B. 13*, p. 175, 11 May 1801; p. 328, 12 March 1805.

[27] *H.B. 13*, p. 174, 11 May 1801; p. 176, 16 May 1801.

But while the Society was ready to protest against abuses, it also made positive contributions to the manning of the fleet. In 1705 for example it offered to lend up to £200 to help raise seamen for a man-of-war then building for the security of the Channel. When the owners of the *Susannah* offered to lend her for six weeks to hold the men raised for the man-of-war, but wanted a guarantee against damage, the Hall agreed to get insurance of up to £600 at a rate not exceeding 2 per cent.[32] When the Admiralty undertook to provide a ship to be used in the Bristol Channel in 1740, the Hall offered to help man it and to provide some of the money. The Master and Mr. Sheriff Becher were requested to wait on the Mayor and to ask him to give direction to impress seamen.[33] In 1759, when the Admiralty sent Captain Gordon to Bristol to raise men, the Society made an agreement with the Admiralty to man two ships itself, and it hired the *Invincible* to hold the men until they were handed over. It would seem, however, that the men so raised were not satisfactory, for Captain Penny of the *Alborough* complained that very few of them were fit for service.[34]

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[28] *H.B. 3,* 6 Nov. 1706.

[29] *H.B. 8,* 13 Dec. 1758.

[30] *H.B. 10,* 22 Aug. 1778.

[31] *H.B. 12,* pp. 65–8, 26 Aug. 1790; p. 69, 24 Sept. 1790. Other complaints about pressing men include *H.B. 8,* 11 Dec. 1759; *H.B. 9,* 31 Jan. 1771.

[32] *H.B. 3,* 28 June 1705, 9 July 1705.

[33] *H.B. 6,* 3 June 1740.

[34] *H.B. 8,* 12 Feb. 1759; 26 Feb. 1759, 28 Feb. 1759, 3 March 1759, 11 April 1759, 13 Nov. 1759.

To encourage recruitment, the Hall on a number of occasions supplemented the bounties offered to those who enlisted. Thus, in 1770 it agreed to join the Corporation in giving an additional bounty of 20s. for every able-bodied seaman and 15s. for every ordinary seaman who joined the navy.[35] Eight years later, it offered 40s. for able-bodied seamen and 15s. for every ordinary seaman and landsmen who volunteered.[36] It was also prepared to give a grant of £21 a year to a fund for clothing and fitting out for sea-service poor boys in the city.[37]

When the war was going badly in 1779, the Society offered the Government £1,000 for the better provision of the navy or for the increase of the armed forces.[38] At the beginning of the war with France in 1793, it was again prepared to supplement the bounties offered for seamen.[39]

A watchful eye had to be kept on legislation relating to the manning of the navy. In 1758, for example, when it received a copy of a bill on this subject, the Committee expressed the view that it was "an absurd, incoherent and impracticable scheme", which would tend to make seamen enter foreign service rather than return home and which would be very injurious to trade. The Hall petitioned the bill.[40] In January and March 1759, it again petitioned against two bills concerning the manning of the navy, but its efforts were unsuccessful.[41] The Committee had to take action once more on this subject in 1781, and again in 1795, when a bill was brought in requiring owners of ships to furnish a certain number of men according to the tonnage of the ship. The Hall said that it realised the need for vigorous measures, but that this proposal would not work and would be injurious to trade. Representatives of the Society were sent to see the M.P.s and to confer with the merchants of London. If the bill could not be stopped, it was at least to be amended. The Mayor was informed and was asked to send a man to London to help.[42]

Another matter which caused concern from time to time was the embargoes placed by the Government on the sailing of ships in time of war. The object was normally to hold up the sailing of merchant ships until the navy had raised the men it needed for the service, or to prevent the export of provisions and other goods which were in short supply in England. Such directives might have unfortunate

[35] *H.B. 9*, 4 Oct. 1770.

[36] *H.B. 10*, 23 Feb. 1778. See also *H.B. 10*, 4 Aug. 1779.

[37] *H.B. 10*, 27 Aug. 1778.

[38] *H.B. 10*, 26 June 1779.

[39] *H.B. 12*, p. 262, 17 Feb. 1793; p. 266, 27 Feb. 1793.

[40] *H.B. 8*, 30 Jan. 1758, 15 April 1758, 18 May 1758; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 92–3, prints the petition.

[41] *H.B. 8*, 15 Jan., 16 Jan., 26 April 1759; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 93–4.

[42] *H.B. 12*, pp. 364–5, 11 Feb. 1795.

effects which were not intended by the Government. Thus, in 1740, the Hall petitioned the House of Commons against a bill enabling the Government to prohibit the export of corn from Great Britain and her colonies. It thought that rice would be included and that this would have very bad effects on Carolina. Its request that rice should be excluded from the prohibited commodities was eventually granted.[43] In February 1762, when there was a six weeks' embargo on all ships carrying provisions, except those going to America in convoy, the Society protested that Bristol was affected very adversely because the Customs Officers applied this to peas and beans and to ships carrying liquor. It claimed that trade was stagnating, and it asked the M.P.s to help. In March, a representative was sent to London, and in April it was decided to ask the King in Council to give general leave to all ships to sail from Bristol to Ireland and Newfoundland, provided they gave security to deliver their cargoes there.[44]

At the beginning of the French War in 1793, the Hall decided to petition for a partial lifting of the embargo.[45] Two years later, the Hall wrote to the wardens, who were in London, asking them to contact the M.P.s and to beg "their immediate Interference" with the Government to secure the removal of the recent embargo, in so far as it affected market boats and Severn trows. They were to point out that the River Severn, the River Parret and all the rivers in Wales brought great supplies to Bristol and also helped distribute the groceries and manufactures of Bristol in Wales, Somerset, Gloucestershire and the North. In addition, M.P.s were to be asked to try to get the lifting of the embargo from the Irish trade and from coasters in the Bristol Channel.[46] On the other hand, the Hall was prepared to support a bill for continuing the embargo until a certain number of men had been raised from each port, and the wardens were instructed to convey this to a meeting in London of shipowners and delegates from the outports.[47] Later in the year, when the Hall received information about another embargo, it decided to draw up a list of West India ships which were about to sail and to request that they might be allowed to go without additional expense.[48]

The role which the Society played in wartime was principally concerned with convoys, the raising of men for the navy and the protection of trade, but it was also involved on occasions with other aspects of the war effort and with national defence. Moreover, it felt

[43] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 51.

[44] *H.B. 8,* 13 Feb. 1762, 27 March 1762, 26 April 1762.

[45] *H.B. 12,* p. 260, 19 Feb. 1793; p. 262, 19 Feb. 1793.

[46] *H.B. 12,* p. 367, 21 Feb. 1795.

[47] *H.B. 12,* p. 367, 24 Feb. 1795.

[48] *H.B. 12,* p. 401, 26 Oct. 1795.

a responsibility as a public body to do what it could to maintain morale.

In the War of the Austrian Succession, the Society petitioned in 1743 that Lundy Island might be garrisoned and fortified to protect it against the French.[49] In 1744, the large number of 48 members were present when the Hall drew up a Loyal Address "to protest our abhorrence to the intended invasion from France" and to express its loyalty at a time "when the Disturbers of Europe are directing their Pernicious Schemes against your Majesty's Dominions in favour of an adjured [*sic*] Popish Pretender . . .". The Hall assured George II that it would defend his undoubted title and the Protestant succession.[50]

In 1745, when the Young Pretender had landed and had defeated General Cope at Preston Pans, there was very considerable alarm in England. The merchants waited upon the Earl of Berkeley, Lord Lieutenant of Bristol, to consider what should be done. At a meeting presided over by the Mayor in the Guildhall, a letter was read from the Duke of Newcastle authorising the Mayor to raise volunteers. An Association was formed and subscriptions were raised. The Corporation offered to subscribe £10,000.[51] On 10 October, the Master informed the Standing Committee that several hundred Bristolians had joined the Association and that it was intended to raise a body of men "sufficient for our defense in these times of Publick Danger". As there was no time to call a General Hall, the Standing Committee decided to subscribe £5,000 on behalf of the Society.[52] This was confirmed by the Hall on 14 October, and the Master was authorised to raise all or part of the money at 4 per cent. Subsequently he had doubts about the wording of the resolution authorising him to pay over £5,000 and he was given fuller authority.[53] The Society then entered into a bond with William Jefferies and Jeremiah Burroughs, Treasurers to the General Subscription, to pay over 10 per cent of the amount promised.[54] However, the crisis passed, and it seems that only 2 per cent of the promised subscription had actually been called for.[55]

On the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756, the Society thanked the King for the vigorous measures he had taken to defend the American colonies and referred to the treachery of our most pernicious enemy and to his insulting threats of invasion.[56] Surprisingly, a Loyal Address to George III on his accession in 1760 attracted only 13 members to the Hall.[57] When peace terms were being negotiated in 1762 and 1763, the Society was anxious to exercise some influence, but it was told by William Hart in London that its Memorial would be regarded as trifling and that it would be impossible to get any alteration. Hart added "where there is no remedy, let not our Society attempt an impossibility".[58] Jarritt Smith added a warning "that the Crown will look upon any attempt of that sort (as) an infringement of its prerogative".[59] It seems that the Merchant Venturers were in danger of getting ideas above their station.

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[49] *Book of Charters 2*, 288, 26 March 1743. Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 56 and note 1. Other ports also petitioned.

[50] *H.B. 6*, 14 March and 15 March 1744.

[51] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 255 ff.

[52] *H.B. 6*, 10 Oct. 1745.

[53] *H.B. 6*, 14 Oct. 1745; *H.B. 7*, 21 Nov. 1745.

[54] *H.B. 7*, 21 Nov. 1745.

[55] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 258.

[56] *Book of Charters 2*, 334.

When peace came in 1763, 24 members turned up at the Hall to prepare an address to the King. They thanked him for protecting commerce in time of war and praised "that Heroic Moderation and Consummate Policy, with which your Majesty, as the Friend of Mankind, in the midst of Victory, seized the happy Minute of restoring Peace . . .". They added, perhaps superfluously, ". . . we shall use our utmost endeavours to improve this happy Period . . . in extending our Trade over the vast Tract of Country, which is added to your Majesty's Dominions . . .".[60]

The ambivalent attitude of the Society towards the troubles in America has already been noted, but when war came, the Society's attitude hardened, and on 18 January 1777 it approved by 25 votes to 6 an address congratulating the King on the success of his armies in America.[61] In 1779, it assurred the King that the ambitious "Insolence of the French and the insidious treachery of the Spaniard shall not dismay us. . . ." An amendment asking for a change of government was rejected by 16 votes to 10.[62]

War came with France in 1793, and this was to become total war on a scale not hitherto experienced. The first stage from 1793 to 1802 produced a number of Loyal Addresses from the Society. In November 1795, 20 members were present to approve an address to the King about the recent attempt on his person, and an amendment to the loyal address expressing the hope that a solid and durable peace would before long be secured was rejected.[63] The Hall was supporting the policy of Pitt and not that of Fox. It is surprising, however, that in a Society which was much concerned with protecting commerce against enemy action, only 11 members turned up on 27 October 1797 to vote an address on the victory of Admiral Duncan over the Dutch.[64]

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[57] *H.B. 8*, 6 Nov. 1760.

[58] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 11, 27 Nov. 1762, William Hart to the Society.

[59] *Ibid.*, 27 Nov. 1762, Jarrit Smith to the Society.

[60] *H.B. 9*, 19 April 1763. [61] See pp. 142–4. [62] See *H.B.10*, 18 Jan. 1777.

[63] *H.B. 12*, p. 414, 14 Nov. 1795; *Book of Petitions*, p. 125.

[64] *H.B. 13*, p. 31, 27 Oct. 1797.

In the early months of 1798, the international situation seemed very gloomy, and England was in a serious position. The 17 members of the Hall who turned up for a meeting on 23 February were aware that "at this present Important Crisis when our Commerce prosperity Independance [*sic*] and Very Existance as a Nation are at stake" something ought to be done to help, but, as we have seen, they decided that they could only manage to offer £600 as a gift to the "Voluntary Subscription for the Defence of the Kingdom".[65] Evidently, they were not as concerned about the crisis as they suggested.

The war situation improved in the course of the year, but the merchants do not seem to have been unduly appreciative of what the navy was doing for them. Only 13 members were present on 18 October 1798 to vote an address to the King on Nelson's victory at the battle of the Nile.[66] 19 turned up on 22 May 1800 to congratulate the King on his escape from yet another attempt on his person,[67] but attendance was down to 9, all members of the Standing Committee, when a Hall was called on 10 May 1802 to congratulate the King on the end of the War.[68] In 1802 at a General Hall, it was agreed to allow the use of the Hall to a Committee to honour William Pitt, but the efforts of the great war minister were apparently not much appreciated if one can judge from the fact that only 7 members were present on that occasion.[69] Peace was short-lived, and in July 1803, a Hall was called to assure the King of support in the war against Napoleon.[70]

In one or two other modest ways the Society made a contribution to the war effort in the years 1793–1802. When the war came, the Government floated a large loan, and for administrative convenience an Act of Parliament laid down that if the principal merchants in any place wanted to apply for exchequer bills in large quantities of £100,000 or £200,000 and then apportion them among themselves, they might make block applications. The Standing Committee thought that if the merchants and other citizens of Bristol wished to do this, they could borrow the Hall for the purpose.[71]

The Hall did not show any great interest in the military effort, no doubt thinking that its particular concern was with the sea. When there was a request for help for a subscription to relieve the widows and families of warrant officers and others, it informed the Mayor that it did not intend to take it up as a public body,[72] but in 1797 it voted 50 guineas to the widows and orphans of those who died in Duncan's victory over the Dutch.[73]

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[65] See p. 119.

[66] *H.B. 13*, p. 75, 18 Oct. 1798; *Book of Petitions*, p. 128.

[67] *H.B. 13*, p. 136, 22 May 1800.

[68] *H.B. 13*, p. 208, 10 May 1802.

[69] *H.B. 13*, p. 211, 26 July 1802.

[70] *H.B. 13*, p. 252, 1 July 1803 (9 members present); *Book of Petitions*, pp. 132–3.

[71] *H.B. 12*, p. 276, 16 May 1793.

[72] *H.B. 12*, p. 403, 26 Oct. 1795.

In years in which invasion seemed imminent and in which the French actually made a small landing at Fishguard, the Government was very concerned with the defence of the rivers, creeks and bays. In 1798, Lord Dundas wrote to the Mayor of Bristol about the possibility of converting launches and longboats from merchant ships into gunboats. The Society, with an eye on the interests of merchantmen, consulted Captain Nicholas, R.N., about whether pilots' towboats could be used instead. He gave the wrong answer and reported that they would not be so effective, but added that if there was a shortage of launches from large merchantmen, towboats might be of use in protecting the harbour. The Committee of the Hall adjourned to the Council House to consult the Committee of the Corporation. The quay wardens were then instructed to find out the number of boats in the port of 17 feet or more which were capable of carrying cannon and cannonades. The water bailiff was told to find the number and calibre of cannons and cannonades and the amount of shot available in the city and neighbourhood. Mr. Hilhouse was instructed to fit up a long boat on the model suggested by the Government.[74] In May, the pilots put to the Hall proposals about using their boats for the defence of the immediate neighbourhood of Bristol, and these were forwarded by the Hall to the Mayor.[75] In June of the same year, the Society agreed to lend the pile engine at the Hotwell to the engineer employed in erecting batteries for the defence of Bristol.[76]

The crisis passed, and in 1801 and 1802 the Society was engaged in settling the account with the Corporation for the cost of fitting up the gunboats.[77] If it was not exactly a lovely war, the Society had not after all found it too exhausting in time or money.

[73] *H.B. 13*, p. 32, 27 Oct. 1797.

[74] *H.B. 13*, pp. 58–9, 21 April 1798.

[75] *H.B. 13*, p. 61, 15 May 1798.

[76] *H.B. 13*, p. 62, 26 June 1798.

[77] *H.B. 13*, p. 125, 13 Feb. 1800; p. 173, 4 March 1801.

CHAPTER 11

The Society as a Property-Developer in the Eighteenth Century

THE management and development of property had not been a major concern of the Society in the seventeenth century, but in the eighteenth century the Hall found itself increasingly involved and had to devote a great deal of time and energy to such matters. To a considerable degree, its financial difficulties in the later eighteenth century can be explained by the amount of capital which it had invested in the purchase of Champion's Dock and the adjoining property, in the development of the Hotwell and in buying property elsewhere.

The Society's manor of Clifton included not only the low-lying area down by the river but also "Clifton on the hill", which developed in the second half of the century as a desirable residential district and which also provided lodgings for the fashionable society which visited the very popular Hotwell. The population of Clifton grew from about 250 in 1710, most of whom probably lived on the low ground near the Avon, to about 1,400 in the later seventeen-eighties.[1] A number of different developers were involved, and a detailed study of the growth of Clifton and Hotwells is beyond the scope of this book, but it is necessary to give some indication of the part played by the Society.

The full development of Clifton had to wait until the great expansion of Bristol in the nineteenth century, but the possibilities were already being exploited in the eighteenth, and the Society became increasingly aware of the importance of what had hitherto been primarily agricultural land. It was in a position to make building land available by granting building leases, and as lord of the manor it had valuable rights over the waste which could be used to provide stone for building.

Clifton does not loom very large in the Society's records in the first half of the eighteenth century, although the Hall was of course concerned from time to time to renew agricultural leases and to obtain fines for such renewals, as well as to collect rents from the property which it owned in the manor. Occasionally, there was a request for permission to build. Thus, in 1719 the Standing Committee viewed the ground in Clifton which Mr. Goldney wanted to purchase and agreed to grant him a lease.[2] In 1723, Mr. Hollidge asked permission to build on land held from the Society,[3] and in 1746 Charles Gregory renewed his lease on a house and garden in Clifton, promising to lay out £30 in building and repairs.[4] In the seventeen-forties, the Society was showing considerable interest in the repair of roads in Clifton,[5] and in 1746 it ordered a survey of the manor by John Jacob de Wilstar, a surveyor who was frequently employed by the Corporation.[6] The next year, Samuel Gardiner, the Society's Beadle who collected the rents, was ordered in future to account direct to the Treasurer for Clifton and Bristol rents and disbursements.[7] It seems probable that it was in the seventeen-forties that the Society began to give serious consideration to the possibility of building developments in Clifton and was prepared to give encouragement to it.

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[1] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 87, 472.

At the end of 1749, instructions were given that Mrs. Hibbs, Mr. Combe and Mr. Gardiner were to be informed that if they could let any land in Clifton which they held for the Society for building, they could have new leases.[8] Most of the land leased by the Society at this time was for 99 years or 3 lives. In event of one or more of the lives coming to an end, they could normally be renewed on payment of a fine, but presumably any one who intended to lay out a large sum in building wanted greater security than would be given by a lease for lives, and no doubt this is what lay behind the agreement which the Society made with Andrew Hooke in 1751 by which his 99-year lease determinable on three lives was changed to a 42 year lease, renewable every 14 years, on condition that he laid out £1,000 in building in the next three years.[9] Two years later, Mrs. Hibbs, who also wanted to build, applied to the Society for permission to change her 99-year lease to one for 40 years, renewable every 14 years. She made a further agreement with regard to another part of her land in 1757.[10]

The planning permission granted by the Society to Mrs. Hibbs provoked a reaction from another of the Society's lessees, John Deverell, who said that he had intended to apply for a renewal of the lease of his house and land, but that Mrs. Hibbs was about to erect buildings on her ground below his garden "whereby his view of the country would be taken off and his House greatly lessened in value . . .". The Hall appointed three representatives to act as conciliators.[11] Evidently, Deverell then decided that Mrs. Hibbs was on to a good thing, for in 1758 he too applied to the Society to replace his 99-year lease by a 40-year building lease, with the right to renew every 14 years for a fine of one year's rack rent of the premises. He paid a fine of £164 for one grant and £40 for another.[12]

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[2] *H.B. 4*, 9 July 1719, 7 Oct. 1719.

[3] *H.B. 4*, 29 April 1723.

[4] *H.B. 7*, 10 Nov. 1746.

[5] See pp. 187–9.

[6] *H.B. 7*, 3 May 1746. His splendid survey is preserved in the Society's archives. For a reproduction in reduced form, see 'Clifton in 1746' by John Latimer, *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, xxiii, 1900.

[7] *H.B. 7*, 4 Feb. 1747.

[8] *H.B. 7*, 17 Nov. 1749.

[9] *H.B. 7*, 18 July 1751.

[10] *H.B. 8*, 15 Feb. 1753, 3 April 1753, 6 June 1757.

Other agreements followed, including one with Samuel Gardiner who in 1761 surrendered a lease for 3 lives on the Withy Bed, Clifton, and obtained a 4-year lease in return for an undertaking to lay out £500 on a good and substantial messuage within three years.[13] Gardiner sublet to Joseph Thomas and partners, who erected buildings and obtained leave from the Society to dig for stone on Clifton Down.[14] In 1763–4, Benjamin Probert, Robert Comfort and other speculating builders were developing Dowry Parade, an extension of the east side of Dowry Square, on land granted by the Hall for 39 years 6 months, renewable every 14 years and beginning on 25 March 1762.[15]

Among other leases granted in the seventeen-sixties was one to Richard Combe who in 1764 exchanged a 99 year lease for a 40 year lease, renewable every 14 years, for £63 and one year's rack rent of the buildings erected. In return, he agreed to lay out £500 in good and substantial building within the next five years. Three years later he obtained another building lease on the same lines.[16] The agreement with Combe led to complaints from Mrs. Hibbs, whose building had earlier on annoyed Mr. Deverell, and representatives from the Hall viewed from her ground the garden on which Combe proposed to build and decided that the proposed building would not destroy her amenities.[17] Combe also ran into trouble over a set of stables he wanted to build and to which Mr. Hobhouse and Mr. Deverell raised objections.[18] Deverell himself got a new lease of Litfields and Cecills Litfields in 1766 and agreed to give up a limekiln which was creating a nuisance and to take instead a lease of a lime kiln on Clifton Down for a fine of £6.[19] In 1767, Mr. Combe was given permission to dig for stone on the east side of Honeypen Hill.[20]

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[11] *H.B. 8*, 15 Nov. 1757.

[12] *H.B. 8*, 24 Oct. 1758, 31 Oct. 1758.

[13] *H.B. 8*, 21 Dec. 1761. For Gardiner, see pp. 109–10, 183–4, 212–13.

[14] *H.B. 8*, 28 Oct. 1762.

[15] Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol*, pp. 201–2. The Society's nineteenth-century *Inventory of Deeds* shows under the heading "Land and premisses whereon Love Street, Charles Street, Charles Place and the first six houses in Dowry Parade are built" a number of relevant leases, including grants to Samuel Gardiner on 11 Jan. 1736, 3 Nov. 1752, 25 March 1757 and 16 March 1762.

[16] *H.B. 9*, 19 Jan. 1764. See also another agreement, *ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1767.

[17] *H.B. 9*, 30 Oct. 1764.

[18] *H.B. 9*, 4 Feb. 1767.

[19] *H.B. 9*, 9 Dec. 1766.

That the Society and its officials were well aware of the potentialities of the Clifton property in the seventeen-sixties is shown in a report to the Hall by the Clerk, Samuel Worrall, in 1763. He informed the members that he had inspected the title of the Society to the manor of Clifton and that he thought that the Society might have a right to 12 acres, formerly called Short Grove, which for a number of years had lain open to common on Durdham Down. The Standing Committee thought that the land might be let for building, and Worrall was instructed to continue his investigation. There is, however, no further information in the *Hall Books*, and it would seem that Worrall had been over-enthusiastic.[21]

It is not possible to follow in detail all the building leases granted by the Society during the rest of the century or to fit them into an overall picture of the development of Clifton, but a few of the more important developments may be briefly noted. Prince's Buildings, originally granted by the Society to Samuel Powell on a 40-year building lease beginning 1 May 1789. Powell, who was for some years the Society's lessee of the Hotwell,[22] had built the Colonnade, Hotwells, and also promoted the erection of St. Vincent's Parade on land which he held from the Society. He sublet his holding to various people from June 1789 onwards and eventually conveyed his property to William Paty.[23] In 1791, the Society granted to Harry Elderton, a Bristol lawyer, on a 40-year lease, the land on which the Lower Crescent (or Cornwallis Crescent) was being built.[24] Land for the nineteen houses which were known as Belle Vue, Clifton, was also let to Harry Elderton by the Society on a forty year lease on 21 May 1792.[25] These and other grants made a considerable contribution to the development of Clifton, although, of course, they were only part of the total building development in that area.[26]

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[20] *H.B. 9*, 30 Sept. 1767. The present Richmond Hill, more commonly known in the eighteenth century as Honeypen Hill.

[21] *H.B. 9*, 24 March 1763.

[22] See p. 193.

[23] Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol*, pp. 224–5. For a list of leases in connection with this property, see the Society's nineteenth-century *Schedule of Deeds*, p. 413, under the heading Princes Buildings and St. Vincents Parade.

[24] See Ison, *op. cit.*, pp. 231 ff. The principal firm engaged in building went bankrupt in 1793 and a number of partially-built houses remained derelict until well into the next century.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 234. The partially-finished houses were also left derelict by the builders after the crisis of 1793.

[26] Other grants can be found in *H.B. 9*, 6 Nov. 1772; *H.B. 12*, p. 129, 30 April 1791; pp. 151, 152, 27 Sept. 1792; pp. 183–4, 7 Jan. 1792; pp. 202–3, 22 May 1792; pp. 219–20, 12 Sept. 1792; p. 247, 10 Dec. 1792; *H.B. 13*, p. 100, 1 July 1799. From the leases, it would be possible to work out in detail the Society's contribution.

The Society was certainly anxious to further such schemes by granting satisfactory leases. When it agreed to one proposal in 1791, it specifically said that the merchants agreed to a new lease "As they have usually done to incourage improvements there."[27]

The Hall was well aware that what it wanted on its land was high-class property. It acted as a planning authority. In one case, the developer's plans were turned down because "they consider the ground as a very eligible spot and that it should be laid out for larger and better houses and not so much crowded with Buildings".[28] In another case, they laid down that the developer must erect three houses of the value of at least £1,500 each "in a uniform continuation of the Crescent from Mr. Goodwin's, late Hobhouse's, along the upper part of the ground". He or his executors were to agree when the lease was renewed to continue the crescent.[29] In 1792, they approved a change of plan for Mr. Isaac Cooke's crescent.[30] In general, the Society was quite willing to give planning approval when it seemed reasonable to do so. Thus, in 1775 it informed Lady Huntingdon that she need not remove a flight of steps on the north side of the Old Assembly Room, which she had converted into a chapel, but required her to acknowledge that the steps were there by permission of the Society and that she must remove them if required to do so.[31] On the other hand, on 5 November 1799 Jeremiah Osborne, the Clerk, took a very firm line with an offender: "Sir, At a Committee of Merchants held yesterday, it was stated you were building at Princes Place Clifton in a very irregular manner and contrary to your Covenants. I believe you know that the Society are not to be trifled with, and will by no means permit any such conduct. Let me see you on the subject as soon as you conveniently can. . . ."[32]

Not all the Clifton property, of course, was ripe for building development, and not all the 99 year leases were turned into 40 year building leases, but as property values in Clifton were going up in the later eighteenth century, there were opportunities for obtaining some very satisfactory fines for renewal of leases. Thus, in 1792, £284 18s. 6d. was charged for renewing a lease in Dowry Square,[33] and the price for adding one life to a lease of some ground in Clifton near Whiteladies Turnpike, which was used as a nursery, was

[27] *H.B. 12*, p. 129, 30 April 1791.

[28] *H.B. 12*, p. 219, 12 Sept. 1792, with reference to Mr. Lockier's plans for building on Honeypen Hill.

[29] *H.B. 12*, pp. 151–2, 27 Sept. 1791. The Society subsequently agreed to let him build 4 houses of £1,000 each instead of three at £1,500; *ibid.*, p. 166, 27 Oct. 1791.

[30] *H.B. 12*, p. 220, 12 Sept. 1792; *ibid.*, p. 247, 10 Dec. 1792.

[31] *H.B.* 10, 6 Nov. 1775.

[32] *Letter Book 1781–1816*, p. 305, 5 Nov. 1799.

[33] *H.B. 12*, p. 202, 22 May 1792.

£120.[34] Mr. Goldney paid £140 to renew a lease on a piece of ground in 1798,[35] and a renewal at Jacob's Well in 1802 brought in £250.[36]

If the manor of Clifton was to be developed as a residential district, it needed adequate roads, and from at least as early as the seventeen-thirties the Hall was busy making its own improvements and cooperating with others. Thus, in 1732, it gave order that the way to Clifton whould be made wide enough for two coaches or carriages to pass each other; in 1734, it ordered that the road from Clifton Down to Durdham Down should be amended at the cost of the Society, and in 1735 it gave £20 towards amending the road from Redhill through Redland to Durdham Down.[37] The Standing Committee was instructed in 1746 to report on the roads in and about Clifton. It found that the old road from Jacob's Well to Clifton was very much out of repair and was impassable for carriages, as the banks on both sides had fallen in. It thought the road should be repaired and that the Hall should contribute to the cost.[38] In 1761, Thomas Knox was given £20 to make a road from the Turnpike Road leading through Clifton to Durdham Down to the Turnpike leading from the Hotwell to Durdham Down, and £10 was given to James Hilhouse as a free gift to mend the road from Clifton Turnpike to the new buildings in Mrs. Hibbs' field.[39]

The Hall was very ready to cooperate with the Turnpike Commissioners. In the second half of the century they were active in improving and developing the roads in and around Bristol and their work helped to make more attractive the areas in which the Society held land. When in 1758 an Act was passed to extend the existing turnpike roads, including provision for what was to become Park Street, and for the extension of this road to Whiteladies Gate, the Society agreed to help by giving up some of its land.[40] When the Clerk to the Commissioners of the Turnpikes informed the Hall of a petition from the inhabitants of Clifton for a bill which would, among other things, make roads from Whiteladies Road and Gallows Acre Lane to Bristol, the Hall was agreeable to allowing the roads to pass through part of its ground in Honeypen Hill field.[41] In 1783, it agreed to give up part of its land when the Commissioners of Turnpikes wanted to make a new road from Gallows Acre Lane to the Whiteladies Road.[42] Earlier, it had leased part of the Clifton Waste near the tollgate on Clifton Down and Gallows Acre Lane for use as a tollkeeper's house at the rent of 1d. a year.[43]

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[34] *H.B. 12*, p. 304, 23 Oct. 1793; p. 443, 4 Oct. 1796.

[35] *H.B. 13*, p. 69, 17 July 1798.

[36] *H.B. 13*, p. 207, 10 May 1802.

[37] *H.B. 5*, 11 May 1732; *H.B. 6*, 5 March 1734; 9 May 1735.

[38] *H.B. 7*, 6 Feb. 1746; 30 April 1746.

[39] *H.B. 8*, 2 March 1761. The numerous other references to roads in the Society's records include: *H.B. 9*, 19 March 1764, £10 10s. towards the road from Stoke in Westbury to Sea Mills; 19 Dec. 1765, £20 for the road from Jacob's Well by the Black Horse to Clifton parish church; 11 May 1767, £21 for the road leading to Durdham Down through Gallows Acre Lane; 8 Sept. 1767, agreement to share with the Corporation the cost of widening and amending the road from College Green to the Boar's Head at an estimated cost of £115 9s.; *H.B. 12*, p. 6, 23 Nov. 1789, £80 towards the repair of the road from Limekiln Lane to the Hotwells.

[40] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 331, 333; *H.B. 9*, 18 May 1767.

Under the wharfage lease, the Society had responsibility for maintaining part of the road between Bristol and Rownham Ferry, and it gave this a good deal of attention because it was important commercially and gave access to the Hotwell.[44] In 1760, the Surveyor of Highways of Clifton parish asked the Hall to repair the road from Limekiln Dock to the Hotwells, and the Society gave 100 guineas towards widening Limekiln Lane and £30 towards putting College Green in order.[45] Such efforts were always liable to be sabotaged by those who misused the roads. Early in 1761 Henry Smith wrote to the Master, Joseph Daltera, complaining that Richard Rogers was hauling large quantities of stone from the quarry behind the King David in carts with narrow wheels and that "consequently the road which you Gentlemen Merchants have been at so great an expense to make so fine will be Cutt and Torne up as bad as ever it was, if you Don't put a Stop to it. . . ."[46]

Other occasions on which the Hall gave attention to this road included an order in 1763 for improvements on the part of the road from the King David to the Hotwell House. The Committee also drew attention to the need for improvement on the stretch between Limekiln Dock and Dowry Square running through a street lately made called Love Street,[47] £80 was provided for repair of the road from Limekiln Dock to Hotwells in 1789, and next year 10 guineas were given for street lights.[48]

There was, however, some doubt about what was the responsibility of the Surveyor of Highways of Clifton and what were the responsibilities of the Society under the wharfage lease.[49] The matter came to a head in 1792 when the Corporation received complaints about the road to Hotwells and asked the Society to carry out repairs. The Society maintained that it was responsible for only part of the road and that repair of the remainder should be done by the parish of Clifton. The dispute was eventually taken to Gloucestershire Quarter Sessions, which decided that the parish was responsible for the part of the road in question.[50] On this occasion, the Society was not willing to help, because it denied legal responsibility, but in general it had over the years done a great deal to assist in the improvement of roads in Clifton and Hotwells. This, of course, increased the value of its own property, but the area as a whole benefited from what it did.

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[41] *H.B. 10*, 13 Feb. 1779.

[42] H. B. 11, p. 28, 12 May 1783. For other examples, see *H.B. 12*, p. 386, 30 June 1795; *H.B. 13*, p. 25, 10 June 1797.

[43] *H.B. 9*, 5 June 1767.

[44] *H.B. 12*, p. 189, 20 March 1792; p. 291, 7 Sept. 1793.

[45] *H.B. 8*, 10 March 1760; 25 March 1760.

[46] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 6, 20 Jan. 1761, Henry Smith to Joseph Daltera.

[47] *H.B. 9*, 24 March 1763. Love Street was built on the Society's property. See also *H.B. 9*, 8 Sept. 1767.

[48] *H.B. 12*, p. 6, 23 Nov. 1789; p. 70, 27 Sept. 1790.

[49] *H.B. 9*, 31 March 1768; 8 April 1768.

The development of building made the Society increasingly aware of the importance of its quarries. It was very fortunate to possess, as lord of the manor of Clifton, these valuable assets on the manorial waste. They were let out to developers and to lime burners,[51] and efforts were made to check illegal encroachments. Thus, in 1759 the Clerk sent a sharp letter to Ralph Seddon, saying "if you dig any more stones on Clifton Down, you will be prosecuted forthwith", and in 1764 order was given to prosecute a man who had been working a quarry for two years.[52] Sometimes, the Hall seems to have been too enthusiastic in granting quarrying rights. In 1770, for example, George Tyndall complained on behalf of Mrs. Adams that as a result of quarrying on Honeypen Hill, part of her ground had fallen in, and it was decided to build a wall round the quarry.[53] There was more subsidence in 1772, and one of the quarries had to be closed.[54] Quarrying near the river also raised problems since the quarriers did not always build stanks to prevent large stones rolling into the river. The Society drew up regulations, but it was often difficult to enforce them effectively.[55]

The Hall was also concerned with the Downs and the manorial waste, partly because it needed to protect its property against illegal encroachment, partly because it realised their value as an amenity, particularly in relation to the high-class property in Clifton. It was not always easy to say where boundary lines lay, and in a time of rapid building development, there was a certain amount of nibbling away of the waste by developers and house-owners. The Hall ordered a report to be made on encroachments in 1759 and instructed the Clerk to take action against those responsible.[56] Thus, one of

[50] *H.B. 12*, pp. 189–92, 20 March 1792; p. 291, 7 Sept. 1793.

[51] See, for example, *H.B. 9*, 30 May 1764, 4 Feb. 1765, 1 April 1769. *Rental of Land &c Belonging to the Society of Merchants taken in 1766*, pp. 37–9, gives details of quarries held from the Society, and it also includes quarries on the Somerset side held jointly by the Corporation and the Society to prevent nuisances on the banks of the Avon. For the actual grants, see Society's deeds, Box 13^{B}, bdle. 62.

[52] *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 12 Dec. 1759; *H.B. 9*, 7 Nov. 1764.

[53] *H.B. 9*, 9 April 1770; 18 April 1770.

[54] *H.B. 10*, 16 Nov. 1772, 18 Nov. 1772.

[55] See, for example, *H.B. 9*, 4 Feb. 1765.

[56] *H.B. 8*, 4 Dec. 1759.

those concerned received a letter to this effect: "Madam, The Society being informed that a strip of ground, part of Clifton Down, has been for some years taken from the Downs and laid into a Field belonging to you and your sisters, I am ordered to call on you to show title. Otherwise, an ejectment will be delivered".[57] A little earlier, the Hall had informed Mrs. Parsons that it thought she had built her coach house on the waste, and she agreed to pay a rent in acknowledgement that the land belonged to the Society.[58] In 1773, it was noted that a large amount of turf and mould had been illegally removed from Durdham Down, and order was given to insert a notice in the newspapers that those responsible would be prosecuted.[59]

In an attempt to preserve the Downs and to prevent nuisances, the Hall gladly accepted an offer of Sir William Draper in 1766 to act as Conservator of Clifton Down,[60] and in 1783 it appointed one of its members, Robert Smith, to be gamekeeper for the manor of Clifton.[61] Nevertheless, it was difficult to keep the Downs under control, and nuisances continued. Thus, in 1790 the Hall had to consider a complaint against a man who drove asses and trespassed on Clifton Down and who when his beasts were impounded forcibly rescued them,[62] and in 1801 the Clerk had to write to Mrs. Godfrey, saying "I hereby give you notice that you are not to hang Cloaths to dry on the Wastes or Commons of Clifton and that if you do so, I shall proceed against you. . . ."[63]

Although the Hall was prepared to allow the parish of Clifton to have part of Honeypen Hill for a burial ground[64] and to grant a lease to the Brass Wire Company of Bristol to cut and carry away fern, gorse and heath from all the commons in the manor of Clifton,[65] its concern for the preservation of amenities was shown in its refusal in 1791 to permit a powder magazine to be set up near Oakham on the boundary of Clifton,[66] and in its turning down of a request to grant a mining lease on Clifton waste in 1792.[67] Its general attitude at the end of the century was stated in a letter which a somewhat embarrassed Clerk was instructed to write to Mr. Henry Seymour of Redland Court in 1799. The Clerk regretted having to trouble Mr. Seymour, but he had been told to point out that the Society was Lord of the Manor of Clifton and as such was entitled to the soil of Durdham Down. He went on to say that "in order to keep the surface in good condition for the accommodation of persons walking and riding there (they) have uniformly refused every person applying permission to cut Turf or dig mould", and they had offered a reward of 5 guineas for information. The man who worked the quarries by the side of the wood at Durdham Down had informed the Hall that a few weeks ago, Mr. Seymour's carts had removed turf and mould. The Clerk was sure that this was done without Mr. Seymour's knowledge, but he had to add apologetically "I fear the Society will expect you to pay the sum promised to the Informer."[68]

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[57] *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 12 Dec. 1759.

[58] *H.B. 8*, 27 June 1759, 12 July 1759.

[59] *H.B. 10*, 15 Dec. 1773.

[60] *H.B. 9*, 9 Dec. 1766.

[61] Deeds, Box 13^B, bdle. 62, 9 Jan. 1783. Deputation from the Society to Robert Smith to be their gamekeeper for the Manor of Clifton; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 25, 6 Jan. 1782. In 1795, Philip John Miles was appointed gamekeeper of Clifton (*H.B. 12*, p. 389, 2 July 1795).

[62] *H.B. 12*, p. 78, 9 Nov. 1790.

[63] *Letter Book 1781–1816*, p. 315, c. Feb. 1801.

[64] *H.B. 11*, p. 71, 9 Aug. 1784.

[65] *H.B. 11*, p. 150, 12 May 1789; Society's Deeds, Box 13^B, bdle. 62, 3 Sept. 1789.

[66] *H.B. 12*, p. 148, 16 Sept. 1791.

[67] *H.B. 12*, p. 182, 7 Jan. 1792.

Another piece of property which the Society tried to exploit in the later eighteenth century was the Hotwell. As has been seen, the Hotwell had been leased in the late seventeenth century for 99 years at rent of £5 a year.[69] Thus, for the greater part of the period, the Society was not in a position to make any profit out of the spa, which enjoyed tremendous popularity.[70] Its interest had to be limited to trying to ensure that the lessees did not infringe their covenants, particularly the one by which they agreed to let all the inhabitants of Bristol have access to the water.[71]

It must have been very irritating to the Hall to realise that by granting a long lease of the Hotwell, it had missed an opportunity of exploiting this source of profit.

Although the Society could not do anything about the Hotwell until the lease ran out, it toyed from time to time with the possibility of making use of another hot spring at Oakham Slade, which was discovered in 1702. The Master and several members visited it and approved the water. £10 was voted to make a good way to it, but no further action was taken.[72] In 1729, the Committee again viewed the spring, which was now known as the New Hotwell, and thought that the ground should be cleared so that some experiment might be made with the water.[73] In 1729, a proposal to let the well was rejected, and instead the idea was put forward of fitting it up at the expense of the Hall to provide water for ships.[74] There was a change of plan in 1730, when it was decided to let the spring after all. Samuel Cornett and John Barratt agreed to take it at £110 per annum. They were to dig in order to find the springhead.[75]

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[68] *Letter Book 1781–1816*, p. 306.

[69] Society's Deeds, Box 12, bdle. 19, 4 April 1695. The lease was granted by the Society to Charles Jones and Thomas Callowhill for 99 years from 25 March next. The lessees agreed to spend £500 on the erection of a Pump Room, lodging houses and other conveniences. See also Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 169.

[70] Vincent Waite, *The Bristol Hotwell*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1960.

[71] *H.B. 5*, 29 March 1727; 23 July 1728; *H.B. 9*, 14 Feb. 1764; *H.B. 10*, 20 June 1781.

[72] *H.B. 3*, 12 Jan. 1703.

The new Hotwell was not a success, and in 1746 the Standing Committee had to compound with the lessees for arrears and accept a surrender of the lease.[76] An attempt to auction it was unsuccessful,[77] and it remained unoccupied until 1750, when William Newcombe and John Dolman took a 21 year lease at £24 per annum.[78] In 1778, it was again up for auction, but there were no bidders.[79] It was eventually decided in 1784 to include the lease of this unsuccessful spring in a new lease of the old Hotwell.[80]

The 99-year lease of the old Hotwell would not in the normal course have run out until 1794, but in fact it seems to have been terminated in 1785. In the year before, the Society was already making plans to exploit it, including a proposal that a Piazza and a number of shops should be built there.[81] The Hall was prepared to invest a good deal of capital, and it hoped to get a rent of £600 a year.[82] It received a number of offers, but they were not acceptable.[83] Eventually, it decided to appoint as manager for 5 years Mr. Thomas Perkins, a Merchant Venturer who had been Master in 1780. He was to have one third of the profits and was to try to establish warehouses in London and in Rotterdam for the sale of Hotwell water.[84]

In the period that followed, the Society's Hotwells Committee was extremely active and arranged to carry out a considerable number of improvements. On 25 March 1786, for example, it approved plans for the colonnade and shops,[85] and in July Mr.

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[73] *H.B. 5*, 29 March 1727.

[74] *H.B. 5*, 13 Feb. 1729.

[75] *H.B. 5*, 13 July 1730. The lease is dated 25 March 1731 (Society's Deeds: Box 12, bdle. 19).

[76] *H.B. 6*, 21 Nov. 1743; *H.B. 7*, 6 Feb. 1746; Society's Deeds: Surrender of the lease, 12 April 1746, Box 12, bdle. 19.

[77] *H.B. 7*, 17 June 1746, 15 July 1746.

[78] *H.B. 7*, 23 Oct. 1750; Society's Deeds, Box 12, bdle. 19, 4 Jan. 1750, lease to Newcombe and Dolman. For Dolman, see Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 216.

[79] *H.B. 10*, 23 Sept. 1778.

[80] *H.B. 11*, pp. 86, 87, 27 Oct. 1784.

[81] *H.B. 11*, p. 98, 16 Nov. 1784.

[82] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 217, estimates the amount eventually spent as nearly £3,000.

[83] *H.B. 11*, p. 115, 5 March 1785. For later offers, see *ibid.*, p. 125, 26 March 1785; p. 134, 23 April 1785; p. 143, 18 May 1785; p. 144, 21 May 1785; p. 145, 1 June 1785.

[84] *H.B. 11*, p. 148, 1 June 1785; p. 153, 4 June 1785.

[85] *H.B. 11*, p. 214, 25 March 1786.

Bright consulted Mr. Smeaton in London about machinery. Smeaton said that the machinery had been constructed by Mr. Padmore, a very able engineer, and he thought it improper to alter it. However, he was willing to look at it if asked to do so, although he was no longer in business.[86]

The net profits to the Society, after deducting expenses, taxes and the one-third share which went to Mr. Perkins, amounted in the three years 5 April 1785 to 4 April 1788 to £1,271 0s. 8d.[87] Evidently the Society wanted a bigger return on its capital, and from 1788 onwards it was negotiating with Samuel Powell to take a lease of the Hotwell and other property.[88] In 1790, it was put up for auction. Sir James Laroche offered £840 per annum, but Powell made a successful bid of £900. He was given a 14-year lease.[89] It is probable that he had taken over before 1790, for when there were complaints from the West Indies in May 1789 about the foulness of some of the bottles exported there, Powell described to the Committee the method of bottling and corking, and the Committee made a number of suggestions about improvements.[90]

Powell was committed to pay a large rent, and in order to meet it, he had to make drastic increases in charges. He ran into financial difficulties, and in December 1792 his rent was three-quarters of a year in arrears.[91] In May 1793, he informed the Hall that his goods had been seized for debt, and although he seems to have staggered on for some time, he finally surrendered his lease in 1795 and was taken on as manager by the Society at £3 3s. per week.[92]

The first year of the new arrangement produced a net profit of £917, but in the last four years of the eighteenth century the profit was only £636 per annum.[93] It seems that the increased charges, both at the Hotwell itself and for water bottled there, had done something to decrease the popularity of the Hotwell as compared with the period before the Society took over, but the natural disadvantages of the place and the effect of the French Wars from 1793 onwards must also be taken into account. Latimer's comment that "Short-sighted rapacity . . . had been emphatically punished"[94] seems unduly severe, but the Society had certainly not done as well as it hoped to do, and in the years, 1801–10, the net profits fell to just over £400 a year.

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[86] *H.B. 11*, p. 233, 1 July 1786. Other references to the Committee's work in these years include *H.B. 11*, p. 200, 31 Jan. 1786; p. 202, 2 Feb. 1786; p. 203, 11 Feb. 1786; p. 204, 13 Feb. 1786; p. 207, 21 Feb. 1786; p. 209, 7 March 1786; p. 213, 23 March 1786; p. 214, 25 March 1786; p. 216, 19 April 1786; p. 217, 11 May 1786; p. 225, 22 May 1786; p. 233, 1 July 1786; p. 240, 5 Aug. 1786; p. 242, 8 Aug. 1786; p. 289, 29 Jan. 1787; p. 298, 28 Feb. 1787; p. 313, 23 May 1787; p. 334, 4 Aug. 1787; p. 379, 17 Dec. 1787; p. 396, 18 Feb. 1788; p. 415, 30 April 1788.

[87] *H.B. 11*, p. 415, 30 April 1788.

[88] *H.B. 11*, p. 443, 9 July 1788; p. 489, 9 March 1789. A draft lease was drawn up but not signed in 1789 (*H.B. 11*, p. 508, 29 April 1789).

[89] *H.B. 12*, p. 42, 6 March 1790; Society's Deeds: Box 12, bdle. 19, 17 March 1790 from 25 March 1709.

[90] *H.B. 11*, p. 515, 27 May 1789.

[91] *H.B. 12*, p. 249, 24 Dec. 1792; see also p. 274, 6 May 1793.

[92] *H.B. 12*, p. 277, 25 May 1793; p. 336, 1 July 1794; p. 339, 12 Sept. 1794; p. 401, 26 Sept. 1795. On 25 February 1796, it was estimated that his debts would be met at the rate of 10s. in the pound (*H.B. 12*, p. 428, 25 Feb. 1796).

[93] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 218.

Another major investment in property by the Society has already been examined,[95] but some further comment may be made to illustrate the way in which ownership of an increasing amount of property involved the Hall in a considerable amount of litigation. When the Society purchased Champion's Dock in 1770, it believed that it had secured a sound title both to the Dock and to the land and buildings attached to it. In fact, Champion's title to some 10½ acres of the property was not sound. According to an account in the Society's records, Champion had in 1765 offered £870 to Mr. Shute Adams for this land. The Hall later took the view that this was a high price – "it must be noted that Mr. Champion was a Man who thought nothing of expence when he had a scheme to execute, as many very respectable Persons have too severely felt". George Tyndall, the Adams' family attorney, prepared a conveyance dated 27 December 1765, but it had not been executed when Mr. Adams died on 10 January 1766. His widow was tenant for life of his estate, and she granted a lease to Champion of the 10½ acres. Then, in February 1769, Champion became bankrupt, and in order to make the Dock saleable, he asked her to confirm the unsigned agreement with her late husband. She agreed to do so as far as she was concerned, and she said she would try to prevail on her children when they came of age to sell the land for £780. The Society purchased the Dock and surrounding property from Champion, although there was clearly a difficulty about title. It is not clear whether it knew what it was doing or whether it received bad legal advice.

In 1774, Mary Shute Adams, the eldest child, came of age and was ready to join her mother in making the conveyance, but, says the account, "it very unluckily happened that the Sollicitor of the Society of Merchants was deeply engaged in a Law Suit, which engrossed his whole attention, and made it necessary for him afterwards to take a journey for his health. On his return he was again deeply engaged in Business and thought there was no danger of Mrs. Adams' death." Unfortunately for the Society, on 20 January 1775 "she died very unexpectedly; so very unexpectedly that the young Ladys were then at a Ball or Concert". The Society tried to get the agreement confirmed, but the Adams brothers said their mother had no power to bind them. The Society argued that the agreement was binding and that "all this trouble and expence might (if Prudence had governed, and if an honorable regard for the Act of a Parent had prevailed would) have been saved". To make matters worse, the agreement had apparently been lost. The Hall tried to get its title confirmed by Act of Parliament and offered £780 for the property, but the offer was rejected owing to "the unreasonableness of the Adams Family".[96]

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[94] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 489–90; *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 217–18.

[95] See p. 154ff.

The affair dragged on for many years. Francis Adams and his sisters were prepared to sell for £1,500. The Society then asked for a jury to be empanelled to assess the value, and to its great disgust, the jury in 1776 valued the property at £1,080.[97] The Adams family was not prepared to settle for that amount, and in addition in 1777 it sent in a bill of costs amounting to £287 8s.[98] The dispute dragged on until 1791 when the parties finally agreed to settle for the sum of £1,080 fixed by a jury in 1776.[99] In this matter, as in the matter of the Colston Trust, the Hall found that property rights could be costly and time-consuming, but no doubt the lawyers were happy.

Development also took place in Rownham Meads, in which the Society held a considerable amount of land. From 1755, the Reverend Alexander Daniel held over 31 acres from the Hall on a 99 year lease, determinable on 3 lives, at a fine of £360 for two lives.[100] He surrendered one acre in 1763 and was regranted it on a 40 year building lease, on condition that he laid out £500 in building within 3 years.[101] In 1791, the Society was prepared to pay £2,500 to Mr. Daniel for premises in Rownham Mead, including the Salutation Inn. The arrangement required a private Act of Parliament, which was secured the next year.[102]

It would be tedious to record details of all the property in which the Society was interested in the eighteenth century. It included shops and warehouses on the quay, held under the wharfage lease; a tenement in Corn Street held from the Dean and Chapter; the George Inn, Castle Street, and two other tenements there which were charged with the maintenance of six poor sailors in the Merchants' Almshouse by legacy from Richard Jones; a considerable number of tenements in Limekiln Lane, a building used as a playhouse in Jacob's Well, and a Cold Bath in the same area; a brickyard at Hotwells and a windmill on Clifton Down.[103] Its numerous acquisitions included the King David public house, Hotwells, in 1754, and the Dock Gates public house in 1771,[104] as well as all the property connected with Champion's Dock, quite apart from the Colston Charity lands and the manor of Storgursey which it came to regard as its own.

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[96] This account of the affair, written very much from the point of view of the Society, is to be found in the Society's records in a volume without any title on the cover which contain a printed copy of the Act of Parliament of 1776 concerning the Dock and then some 30 pages relating to the case with the Adams family.

[97] *H.B. 10*, 23 Aug. 1776.

[98] *H.B. 10*, 15 Jan. 1777.

[99] *H.B. 12*, pp. 128–9, 30 April 1791.

[100] See *Rental of lands &c. belonging to the Society . . . taken in 1766*, p. 13.

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 13; *H.B. 9*, 24 March 1763.

[102] *H.B. 12*, p. 166, 27 Oct. 1791; p. 186, 24 Jan. 1792; p. 249, 24 Dec. 1792.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Society of Merchant Venturers remained primarily an organisation concerned with the economic interests of Bristol, but ownership of property and concern for its development, as well as increasing responsibility for charitable and educational trusts, took up a great deal of its time and were likely to make a considerable impact on the outlook of the fairly small number of members who participated actively in its work. This made it less single-minded and less able to provide the commercial leadership required in a new age.

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[103] For Jacob's Well Playhouse, see Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 63 ff., 439. The theatre was built on the Society's land and was opened in 1729. It went on, with some interruptions, until 1782. References in the Society's records include the following: *H.B. 11*, p. 62, 7 June 1784, the building formerly used as a playhouse in great want of repair; *ibid.*, p. 166, 20 Aug. 1785, reference to a messuage formerly called the Horse and Groom, a piece of ground called the Margaretts and the building thereon erected and lately used as a playhouse; *ibid.*, p. 212, 14 March 1786, to advertise the old playhouse for sale; *ibid.*, p. 282, 20 Dec. 1786, materials of the old playhouse to be sold.

On 23 Oct. 1793, the Cold Baths near Jacobs Wells and premises adjoining were to be let to Soloman Roach for £500 (*H.B. 12*, p. 303).

For the windmill, see *H.B. 9*, 9 Dec. 1766, permission to build a windmill on part of Clifton Down called Montpelier to grind corn. Cost will be £300. The Society will lend £200 at 4 per cent. *Ibid.*, 8 April 1768, the Committee to recover possession and give a lease to the person who built it. *H.B. 11*, p. 521, 26 Aug. 1789, Mr. Pigott wanted to fit the mill up as an observatory.

For the brickyard, *H.B. 10*, 26 April 1774; *H.B. 12*, p. 222, 12 Sept. 1792.

[104] *H.B. 8*, 24 Aug. 1754; *H.B.* 9, 30 May 1771.

CHAPTER 12

Charitable and Educational Work in the Eighteenth Century

CHARITABLE and educational work, which had been a modest part of the Society's activity in the seventeenth century, was on a very much larger scale in the eighteenth century, mainly because the Society became responsible for the administration of considerable funds provided by others through the Colston Trust and the Seamen's Hospital Fund. In addition, there was some increase in the charitable and educational work financed from the Society's own resources.

The most important new charitable activity related to the Seamen's Hospital Fund. This was totally ignored by John Latimer, apart from a brief mention of a proposal in 1747 for the establishment of a hospital for the relief of merchant seamen and their families. After stating that in December 1747 the Corporation voted £500 towards a fund and granted a site on Brandon Hill and that the Hall also subscribed £200, Latimer remarked "Afterwards, for reasons now unknown, the scheme was abandoned".[1] It is true that the Hospital was never built and that Bristol did not get its equivalent of Greenwich Hospital, but the Seamen's Hospital Fund was nevertheless established and was administered by the Society until Parliament brought it to an end in the mid-nineteenth century.[2]

Details concerning the origin of the scheme are given in one of the Society's volumes *Seamens Hospital Orders &c 1747–1769*. This begins with a transcript of an Act of Parliament of 1747 "for the Relief and support of Mariners and Disabled Seamen, and the Widows and Children of such as shall be killed, slain or drowned in the Merchants Service". The Act refers to earlier Acts, including one of 7 & 8 William III setting up the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, which imposed a levy of 6d. a month on the wages of every seaman, whether in the Royal Navy or the merchant service, and it also refers to a number of later Acts concerning the Hospital. Since Greenwich Hospital was inadequate to cope with the needs of the navy, let alone of the merchant service, and since seamen in the merchant service were willing to pay 6d. a month for disabled or worn-out seamen, a new corporate body was to be set up by the name

[1] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 269.

[2] See pp. 394–8.

of "the President and Governors for the Relief and Support of Sick, maimed and disabled seamen, and of the widows and children of such as shall be killed, slain or drowned in the Merchant Service". This Corporation might establish hospitals and provide pensions. Detailed regulations were laid down about the production of certificates in support of claims and about the collection of the money, which masters of ships were required to retain out of the seamen's wages. The master of the ship was to keep a Muster Book showing the names and usual place of abode of his seamen before the ship sailed and was to deliver a duplicate copy to the Collector of the Duties at the port of departure. During the voyage, the master had to record all discharges and desertions, all new members taken on, and details of any injuries or deaths. He was to deliver this to the Collector on his return, and the Collector was to make a copy and send the original to the President and Governors of the Company. In Bristol, there were to be special arrangements by which the Society of Merchant Venturers undertook the collection and application of the money. The Society acted as trustees and appointed the Collector or Receiver.[3]

After the transcription of the Act, there follows in this volume a number of extracts from the Society's *Hall Books* relating to the setting up of the charity.[4] We know from the *Hall Books* that when the bill was being considered in Parliament in April 1747, the Hall asked the Standing Committee to write to the M.P.s to get a clause inserted about special arrangements for Bristol,[5] and that on 13 April the Standing Committee approved a draft clause for insertion in the bill making the Master, Wardens, Assistants and Treasurer trustees for the Seamen's Fund in Bristol.[6] When the bill went through, the Hall voted £500 for the Hospital.[7] On 5 December 1747, the Standing Committee was instructed to meet at Martin's Coffee House on the Green to view a piece of ground on Brandon Hill intended for a hospital.[8] The Hall approved the site and asked the Corporation, which had already given £500, to let it have the land at a moderate rent.[9]

We can follow in the *Seamen's Hospital Order Book* the history of this ultimately unsuccessful attempt to erect a hospital. 14 trustees were appointed on 15 October 1747, and Thomas Rothley was appointed Receiver, with an allowance of 6 per cent.[10] Possible sites in Limekiln Lane were considered before the final choice was made of Brandon Hill. In February 1748, orders were given to prepare plans for a hospital for 60 men and to buy and season oak.[11] In May, Mr. Jacob de Wilstar was asked to prepare plans, and these were approved in June. The building was to be 170 feet × 196 feet.[12] It was then decided to change the site to a more convenient place on Brandon Hill, and Mr. de Wilstar was asked to prepare estimates.[13]

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[3] In Hull, a similar task was undertaken by the Brotherhood of the Trinity House of Kingston-upon-Hull.

[4] *Seamens Hospital Orders &c. 1747–1769*, pp. 40 ff.

[5] *H.B.* 7, 6 April 1747 (25 members present).

[6] *Ibid.*, 13 April 1747.

[7] *Ibid.*, 10 Sept. 1747, 30 Sept. 1747.

[8] *Ibid.*, 5 Dec. 1747.

[9] *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1747, 10 Dec. 1747.

[10] *Seamens Hospital Orders &c. 1747–1769*, p. 51, 15 Oct. 1747.

The plan did not go well. The Collector, Mr. Rothley, paid in £145 1s. 11d. in October 1748, and complained that his 6 per cent commission was not enough, as the business involved more trouble than he had expected. His commission was accordingly raised to 9 per cent.[14] The Committee decided that the available money would not support the original ambitious proposal for a hospital for 60 men, and de Wilstar was asked to prepare plans for a smaller building to hold 24 men.[15]

The matter dragged on. A subscription was opened, and a subcommittee considered the new plans.[16] In January 1752, the committee in charge of the proposed hospital was asked to proceed with all convenient speed, and in August 1753 new plans by George Tulley were laid before the Trustees. Estimates were to be prepared.[17] New members were added to the Committee in July 1754, and again it was requested to proceed with all possible expedition.[18] There was a ray of hope when Isaac Edwards, by a will dated 15 June 1757, left £500 to the Hospital provided it was begun within 20 years of his death,[19] but by 1760 the Trustees had decided that there was no hope in the forseeable future. Their Minutes for 15 October 1760 have the following entry: "The Society of Merchants having paid the sum of five hundred Pounds as their Subscription towards the building a Hospital, which sum has been put out at Interest. And it being at present the resolution of the Trustees not to proceed with the building of such Hospital", the sum of £500 should be returned with thanks to the Society, with a request that if the Trustees decided to proceed later, the Society should again be asked to contribute. The oak planks bought for the building were to be sold.[20]

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 55, 10 Feb. 1748.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 60, 12 May 1748; p. 61, 20 May 1748.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 64, 14 July 1748; p. 68, 7 Sept. 1748.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 69, 3 Oct. 1748.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 70, 20 Oct. 1748.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 71, 12 Jan. 1749; p. 75, 9 Aug. 1750.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 84, 24 Jan. 1752; p. 88, 6 Aug. 1753.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 99, 16 July 1754.

[19] *H.B. 11*, p. 400, 28 Feb. 1788, when the Hall was advised to relinquish any claim to the legacy.

[20] *Seamens Hospital Orders &c. 1747–1769*, p. 157, 15 Oct. 1760. See also entries for 6 July 1761, 20 July 1761. See also *H.B. 12*, pp. 183–4, 7 Jan. 1792; p. 187, 24 Jan. 1792 when the Society agreed to sell back to the Corporation land in Limekiln Lane which the Corporation had originally sold to it for £200 for the Hospital.

But although the Hospital never came into existence, the Seamen's Hospital Fund nevertheless continued, and from 1751 the Society paid pensions to various applicants. The accounts are to be found in a number of ledgers and journals in the Society's records. The first Hospital Treasurer's Account for the year 1747–8 shows the Collector, Thomas Rothley, paying in £145 1s. 11d. De Wilstar was paid £8 8s. for his survey, and £1 7s. was expended on 500 forms for the Muster Rolls. After various other payments, the account was in credit for £126.[21] £550 6s. 3d. was paid in for 1748–9.

An idea of the way in which the Fund operated can be gathered from a few examples. In 1770, £734 11s. was paid out to 121 people, most of it by way of pensions, but some in the form of gifts.[22] In 1787–8, £433 was spent on pensions and gifts. In that year, Rothley collected £403 17s. and received £36 7s. in commission. Interest on £4,500 invested in Old South Sea Stock amounted to £135.[23] When the new accounting system began in 1795–6, the stock in the Fund was shown as £6,050 in Old South Sea Stock purchased between 1751 and 1794. Pensions were paid between September 1795 and September 1796 to 5 captains, 2 mates, 2 boatswains, 1 surgeon and 37 seamen (of whom 21 were blind). Twenty-seven widows received payments on behalf of 48 children. In all, about 95 people were relieved, with a total payment of nearly £400.[24]

The records relating to the working of the system in the eighteenth century are of considerable interest. They include a bundle of over 100 applications for relief, some with supporting evidence, which throw light on the perils of seamen in this period.[25] The first 204 cases are recorded in the *Seamen's Hospital Order Book 1747–1769*.[26] The first case recorded was on 6 February 1751 and related to "William Cuzzins who sailed out of this Port in the Alexander, David Duncomb Master, having been deprived of his Sight in the Voyage". He had applied to the Trustees for relief, and "the Certificate of the Fact having been lost or Mislaid, but the same being well known to the Trustees.[26] It is ordered that the said William Cuzzins be allowed three shillings and six pence per week. . . ."[27] Case no. 22 on 20 December 1753 concerned John Fling, late a seaman on the *Black*

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[21] Merchants' Hall Records. *Hospital for Decayed Seamen, No. 1, 1748–1787*, pp. 1 ff.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 65.

[23] *Hospital Book 1787–1835*.

[24] *Seamens Hospital Journal 1796–1830*, p. 2. The figures for 1800 were 96 pensioners receiving £430 4s. 6d.

[25] The original applications are in a bundle marked "1766–1774 Petitions of Seamens Widows". The applications are numbered. I hope at a later date to print some of the documents relating to the Hospital.

[26] The Act of Parliament had laid down rules about the evidence which had to be produced by applicants, usually from the master of their ship.

[27] *Seamens Hospital Order Book 1747–1769*, p. 79, 6 Feb. 1751.

Prince, who lost his sight on a passage from Africa to Virginia. He was to be paid £8 a year in quarterly payments "and he is allowed to reside with his Family at Cork in Ireland. . . ."[28] When application was made on behalf of Ann Hancock, aged 2, an orphan whose father was killed on board the *Juba* in a rising of the slaves, the nurse was given 10s. for her present relief. She was to find out the child's legal place of settlement and was to apply again.[29]

The original applications often have an interesting and moving story to tell. Thus, on 30 January 1769, the ministers and churchwardens of St. Michael's certified that James Harding in the *Speedwell* "was poisoned by Blacks whilst the said ship was on the Coast of Africa" and had left a widow and 2 young children, and the owner of the sloop *William* testified that in about June 1765 in the course of a voyage from Africa to St. Christopher's "Thomas Flood the mate and also the Commander John Westcott were Murdered and thrown Overboard by the Sailors. . . ."[30]

The pension list was reviewed from time to time and pensioners were required to appear before the Trustees. On 2 December 1755, for example, it was reported that "James MacDaniel (was) married since (his) pension (was) granted him to one Catherine Rea, a Roman Catholick, by Scudamore, a Romish Priest; he gets 1s. a week, his wife gets something".[31] When Joshua Holland did not appear as requested, his pension was stopped, but it was restored when he made a proper submission. Four shillings, however, was deducted as a punishment.[32] There was normally a check on the Muster Rolls to make sure that the applicant had contributed for at least 5 years.[33]

The Trustees seem to have made a genuine effort to provide the help needed according to the circumstances and to have shown sympathy and understanding. Thus, Thomas Dilliston, a lad of 15, who lost his sight while his ship was in the Bonny River, "by a distemper which raged among the Slaves" was given 40s. to take him to Ipswich, where his uncle resided, and a pension of 2s. 6d. a week.[34] Martha Mounslow, whose husband "contracted a sickness in a French Prison during the late War of which he afterwards died", had exerted herself to get a maintenance ever since his death about eight years previously. She was in the utmost distress and had one child "who is rendered unable to do anything by means of the

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 92, 20 Dec. 1753.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 96, 15 Feb. 1754. The nurse found out that it was Almondsbury and was given 2 guineas for her pains. *Ibid.*, 18 Sept. 1754.

[30] *Petition of Seamen's Widows*, cases nos. 157, 183.

[31] *Seamens Hospital Order Book 1747–1769*, p. 111, 2 Dec. 1755.

[32] *Ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1766, case no. 5.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 133, 6 Sept. 1758.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 163, 7 Jan. 1761.

Rheumatism". She got 8 guineas "to put her in the way of getting her livelyhood" and was promised 1s. a week as soon as the certificates were delivered to Mr. Worrall's office.[35] Ann Smart, widow of Samuel Smart, late carpenter of the *Marquis of Granby* who was drowned attempting to swim ashore after his ship foundered, was granted 3s. for her two children, aged 5 and 5 months, on 8 May 1764. Three years later, Jane Harding, the grandmother, said that Ann was dead, and that Mr. Rothley had stopped the pay. The Trustees ordered it to be continued and payment backdated to the death of Ann.[36]

Another illustration of the sympathetic treatment of applicants is provided by the case of John Herbert, who received a hurt from a fall from a yard, which rendered his leg useless. When he came out of the Bristol Infirmary, he contracted a debt for his maintenance. He stated that he was a native of Portsmouth and that he could get a living there if he had a wherry. He was given £1 11s. 6d. to pay his debt, 2 guineas to carry him home to Portsmouth, and it was ordered "that Mr Laroche be desired to write to his Correspondent in Portsmouth to lay out a sum not exceeding ten guineas in the purchase of a wherry to be delivered to him at Portsmouth". Eighteenth-century gentlemen did not always believe in doing good by stealth, and the order continued "that on the Wherry there be wrote as follows vizt. The Gift of the Trustees of the seamens Hospital at Bristol to John Herbert to enable him to get his livelyhood in lieu of a Pension. . . ."[37] Cornelius Calahan, who lost his eyesight in a voyage from Calabar to Jamaica as a result of a distemper then raging among the slaves, got a yearly pension of £6 10s., 15s. to pay his landlord, and 10s. to carry him home to Tralee, where he was allowed to reside. Seven months later, "being now in Bristol and destitute of apparel", he received 20s. to be laid out in clothes, and it was agreed that his pension should be paid weekly.[38]

We do not know what the seamen and their dependents thought about the way the Trustees administered the money which came from their monthly contributions or whether they approved of the capital accumulation of over £6,000 which the Society had built up by the end of the century, but the general impression left by the records is that the Trustees took their duties seriously, investigated applications with care, and showed commonsense and understanding. Their achievements certainly compared very favourably indeed with those of many other charitable trustees. A great deal of work must have been involved, particularly for the Treasurer of the Fund, Sir James Laroche.

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[35] *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1766, case no. 167.

[36] *Ibid.*, 8 May 1764, p. 138.

[37] *Ibid.*, 23 April 1767.

[38] *Ibid.*, 7 Sept. 1767, case no. 184.

The Seamen's Hospital Fund was the largest charitable, as distinct from educational, trust administered by the Society in the eighteenth century, but the Hall was also concerned with two almhouses – the Merchants' Almshouse and Colston's Almshouse on St. Michael's Hill.

As has already been noted, in the last decade of the seventeenth century, a donation of £1,000 by the executors of Richard Jones and a gift of land by Edward Colston enabled the Hall to make provision for another 12 people in the Merchants' Almshouse. The almshouse had been rebuilt and extended with the help of subscriptions from some of the members, and on 5 July 1700 it was decided to make up from the Hall stock the sum of about £80 which was still required to complete the rebuilding.

There were no very dramatic developments in the course of the eighteenth century as far as the Merchants' Almshouse was concerned, but at one point there was a proposal to remove it from the site in the centre of Bristol, which it had occupied since it was first established by the Gild of Mariners in the mid-fifteenth century. The Clerk, Samuel Worrall, who always had an eye for property development, produced to the Standing Committee in 1778 a plan of the almshouse and the ground behind it, together with a plan of land recently purchased by the Society in Marsh Street, and suggested that if the almshouse were removed elsewhere "three very capital Lots of Ground scituate exceedingly convenient for Trade may be obtained. . . ." He added, in the manner of a practised developer, that there were several buildings in the manor of Clifton "nearly dropping into hand (of which the Old Play House is one) which are of very little value now, and which may at a moderate expence be converted into an Almshouse, in a very healthy scituation". The Committee thought the plan highly deserving of consideration. Fortunately, nothing further was done about this proposal to destroy a link with the medieval past.[39]

Throughout the century, the Society continued to concern itself with the administration of its almshouse, with selecting candidates for admission, and with handling the problems which inevitably arose when a number of old people were congregated in one place and subjected to a certain amount of discipline. In March 1700, the Standing Committee was instructed to make proper orders for the government of the almshouse.[40] A new set of rules was apparently drawn up in 1744 and again in 1800.[41] In 1742, it had been decided that no married person should be admitted, except the Elder Brother, and that inmates who married should be expelled, but this harsh regulation was repealed in 1749.[42]

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[39] *H.B. 10*, 15 June 1778. The value of the Almshouse site did not grow less with the passing of time, and after the second World War the threat reappeared. See pp. 522–4.

[40] *H.B. 3*, 7 March 1700; *H.B. 6*, 14 March 1744; *H.B. 13*, p. 133, 15 May 1800.

[41] *H.B. 6*, 14 March 1744; *H.B. 13*, p. 133, 15 May 1800.

Disciplinary action was taken from time to time. When it visited the almshouse in 1756, the Committee found that one of the inmates who had been admitted some years earlier had never slept in the place. He was required to attend the Committee to explain. A Mrs. Williams, "having behaved very abusive to some others of the House", was to lose her weekly pay and to come before the Committee.[43] The Elder Brother had to be dismissed in 1785, as did an inmate who in 1787 got with child a poor girl who attended one of the women.[44] In 1790, action had to be taken about almsfolk who had lodgers in their rooms.[45]

It is not easy to judge from the records how diligent the Committee was in inspecting the almshouse or how regular were its visits, but, generally, speaking, one is left with the impression that the Merchant Venturers took an interest in their almsfolk and did not subject them to very harsh discipline. The old people, men and women, were probably a privileged group among the poor of Bristol and had a number of perquisites, including small pensions. The perquisites were increased in 1771 by an anonymous gift of £400 to provide an income of £16 a year to clothe 12 women inmates.[46]

The second almshouse for which the Society was responsible was Colston's Almshouse on St. Michael's Hill which had been founded by Edward Colston in the last decade of the seventeenth century. It had been conveyed in 1696 to Sir Richard Hart and 27 other citizens, chiefly Merchant Venturers, and after Colston's death, nomination of almsfolk was in the hands of the Society.

The finances of Colston's Almshouse did not give the Society nearly as much worry as did those of Colston's Hospital. Annual expenditure seems to have been on average a little under £500 a year in the second and third decades of the century; it dropped to under £350 a year in the seventeen-thirties, but rose again to nearly £500 in the seventeen-forties and to nearly £700 in the seventeen-fifties. In the seventeen-sixties, when expenditure was running at above £550 a year, income was not always sufficient to meet the charges, and there were deficits between 1767 and 1770 amounting in all to about £425. The greater part of this was wiped out by a favourable balance in 1770–1, and there was again a surplus in the seventeen-seventies until the very end of the decade. From then onwards, fairly small annual deficits were normal on this account, although there was a surplus of over £400 at the audit of 1796 which reduced the debt to the Hall very considerably. The amount due to the Hall from the Colston Almshouse Account at the end of the period seems to have been small, and the true deficit was even smaller, since the Hall does not appear to have paid interest to the Almshouse account during the considerable period when the account was in credit.[47]

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[42] *H.B. 6*, 23 Sept. 1742; *H.B. 7*, 26 June 1749.

[43] *H.B. 8*, 18 Aug. 1756.

[44] *H.B. 11*, p. 188, 7 Nov. 1785; p. 361, 31 Oct. 1797.

[45] *H.B. 12*, p. 79, 9 Nov. 1790.

[46] *H.B. 9*, 18 Feb. 1771.

As with its own almshouse, the Hall had to deal with problems of administration and discipline, and a few illustrations can be given of how it carried out the task. In 1760, the Standing Committee considered a complaint against an almsman "for keeping a disorderly woman in the said House and for staying out till twelve o'Clock at Night on Saturday the seventh Instant and not being at Church on the Sunday following". He was admonished.[48] In 1761 when the men were said to be getting over the wall after the gates had been locked, the Standing Committee ordered "Iron Pallisadoes to be fixed upon the Inner Court Wall. . . ."[49] When it was reported that Mary Lovell's apartments "are much infested with Buggs and that there is great Danger that they will spread Farther", the Elder Brother was told to remove all her goods. She was not to bring any of them in again "unless it be of such sort as Buggs cannot harbour in".[50] When the Committee visited the almshouse in 1777, it found that the monuments from St. Michael's Church, which was being renovated, had been stored in the kitchen for the last three years and had "greatly incommoded the Inhabitants". The churchwardens were to be told to remove them. The cistern had no water in it, and this was to be attended to. The Elder Brother complained that the seat in St. Michael's Church was one from which they could not hear the service. The Committee went to the church with the churchwardens and were offered an alternative. The final choice was left to the almsfolk themselves.[51] On the Committee's visit in 1783, the people referred to in "Several Minutes of Drunkenness and Irregularity appearing in the Elder Brother's Book" were admonished.[52] Next year, a man was expelled and another admonished for not attending prayers.[53] Once again, one would like to have the comments of the almsfolk themselves on the Society's administration, but the general impression is that it was humane and sensible.

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[47] The figures given here give a general indication of the position. They are based on the Annual Audit figures given in the *Hall Books*. It would be possible to work out in more detail the precise figures.

[48] *H.B. 8*, 10 June 1760.

[49] *Ibid.*, 13 April 1761.

[50] *H.B. 9*, 15 Oct. 1765.

[51] *H.B. 10*, 6 Oct. 1777.

[52] *H.B. 11*, p. 40, 12 Sept. 1783.

[53] *H.B. 11*, p. 82, 20 Sept. 1784.

In two of the three charitable enterprises which have been examined, the Society was primarily involved as a trustee and administrator of money which came from others, but it devoted some of its own resources to charitable activity in addition to what it spent on the Merchants' Almshouse. Some of this effort was directed to helping Merchant Venturers and their dependents who fell upon hard times. Between 1725 and 1802, at least nine members were given pensions, including three people who had served as Master and one who had been an Assistant. The pensions normally ranged from £20 a year to £40 a year, but in 1764 two former Masters each got £50.[54]

At least 15 widows of members were granted pensions in the same period. The usual amount was £20 a year, but in 1756 Mrs. Benedicta Henville, widow of Richard Henville who had become a member in 1718 and later served as Master, got the "extraordinary" allowance of £30 per annum.[55] Occasionally, help was given to children of deceased members. Thus, in 1733 £10 a year was granted to Sarah Swymmer, daughter of the late William Clarke, a former member, and in 1737 Eliza Smith, daughter of Evan Jones, a former member, got 3s. a week.[56] Rather surprisingly, Job Charlton, the son of a member, who had been entitled to the freedom but who had not taken it up, was given £30 a year in 1791, as was William Swymmer, the son and grandson of former members who was not himself a Merchant Venturer.[57] The claim of daughters seem to have been treated more rigorously. Thus, in 1761 Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Day formerly of Bristol and now a factor abroad, was given a donation of 20 guineas to be paid at the rate of a guinea a week, on the ground that she was the daughter of a former member, Robert Addison, but when her husband died and she was in great distress, her petition for help was referred to the next Hall and no further action seems to have been taken.[58] When the three daughters of James Rogers asked for help in 1802, it was decided, wrongly, that there was no precedent and that it would be highly improper to create one.[59]

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[54] *H.B. 5,* 9 July, 7 Oct. 1725: Edward Atwood, £20 p.a.; Charles Pope, £30 p.a.; *H.B. 6,* 12 Oct. 1739, James Holledge, £40 p.a.; *H.B. 8,* 14 May 1753, Marmaduke Bowdler, £30 p.a.; *H.B. 9,* 28 June 1763, John Crosse, £40 p.a.; *ibid.,* 20 Sept. 1764, Joseph Daltera, 50 guineas p.a., *ibid.,* 20 Sept. 1764 and 7 Nov. 1764; *H.B. 11,* p. 452, 21 Aug. 1788, Samuel Davies, £40 p.a.; *H.B. 13,* p. 102, 1 July 1799, John Champion, £40 p.a.

[55] *H.B. 8,* 24 Aug. 1756. Elizabeth Casamajor, widow of a former Master, received the same amount in 1776 (*H.B. 10,* 5 Feb. 1776).

[56] *H.B. 5,* 18 June 1733; *H.B. 6,* 1 Dec. 1737.

[57] *H.B. 12,* pp. 115, 126, 11 March and 7 April 1791.

[58] *H.B. 8,* 1 June 1761 and 14 Dec. 1761.

[59] *H.B. 13,* p. 206, 1 April 1802.

As befitted a body which championed the Church and the Protestant Succession, the Society was prepared from time to time to make contributions for ecclesiastical purposes. In 1707, it gave £30 towards the cost of completing the episcopal church at Rotterdam.[60] The next year, £20 was voted to help a scheme for erecting lending libraries for the poorer ministers and for dispensing some devotional and practical books in English and Welsh.[61] In 1727, a grant of £50 was made to the minister and churchwardens of the French Church in Bristol for finishing their chapel, provided that one good pew was fitted up for the use of any member of the Society who went there.[62]

Other gifts to churches included £20 in 1705 to repair the tower of St. Stephen's Church, which had been damaged in "the late great storm"; £40 for a new aisle for Clifton Church in 1708; £50 for finishing All Saints' tower in 1716; £30 for rebuilding Stapleton Church in 1726; and £100 for St. Stephen's tower in 1732. This last gift was conditional on the parish allowing the dirt from the quay to be put in the parish dungyard.[63] A grant of 100 guineas was made for a new church at Kingswood in 1752, and 50 guineas for the repair of St. Werburgh's in 1764.[64] Grants which were intended to help urban reconstruction as well as church modernisation included £200 towards the laying open of St. Stephen's in 1772 and £500 for the rebuilding of Christchurch in 1785.[65] A donation of 30 guineas was made towards furnishing the vicarage house in St. George's, Gloucestershire, when a new parish was carved out of St. Philip and St. Jacob, and two years later another 30 guineas was granted, provided that a pew, approved by the Master and Wardens, was set aside for the use of the Society.[66] An annual subscription of £20 a year was voted in 1775 for a chaplain at the Bristol Infirmary,[67] and help was given from time to time to the church in the manor of Stogursey.[68]

To these activities must be added a very great variety of casual charitable donations. Apart from a number of gifts to individuals, there were grants of £200 to the victims of fires in Blandford and Twerton in 1731; of £100 to the victims of fire at Credition in 1743; £50 to a disaster at Honiton in 1747; 100 guineas for a fire in Barbados in 1766, and £250 to the victims of a fire at Jacob's Wells in 1802.[69]

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[60] *H.B. 3*, 24 Oct. 1707.

[61] *H.B. 4*, 10 June 1708.

[62] *H.B. 5*, 11 Jan. 1728. The Huguenots had been required to vacate the Gaunts' Hospital Chapel when it became the Mayor's Chapel.

[63] *H.B. 3*, 3 Oct. 1705; *ibid.*, 29 April 1708; *H.B. 4*, 19 July 1716; *H.B. 5*, 10 March 1726; *ibid.*, 11 May 1732.

[64] *H.B. 7*, 20 Jan. 1752; *H.B. 9*, 19 March 1764.

[65] *H.B. 9*, 8 Oct. 1772; *H.B. 11*, p. 130, 26 March 1785.

[66] *H.B. 8*, 10 March 1760, 7 July 1762.

[67] *H.B. 10*, 13 March 1775.

[68] See, for example, *H.B. 13*, p. 152, 27 Aug. 1800, £127 6s. to repair the chancel of Stogursey.

Relief of distress in hard times also received attention. Thus, in 1767 £21 was given to the poor in Hanham, Bitton and St. George's, and £10 10s. to the poor in the parishes of St. Philip and St. Jacob and Bedminster. At the end of 1775, when the conflict with the American colonies was turning into a shooting war, 100 guineas were donated to a fund for the relief of disabled soldiers, but a proposal to give another 100 guineas to help workmen put out of employment as a result of the struggle was rejected. In 1784, 10 guineas were given to the poor in St. Philip and St. Jacob, and 5 guineas to St. James's and to St. Stephen's. Another 80 guineas was contributed to poor relief later in the year. When the Corporation voted 100 guineas for this purpose in 1789, the Society provided another 50 guineas, in addition to 20 guineas for pilots and towboatmen.[70]

The War of 1793 added to the perennial problem of poverty. One hundred guineas was donated to poor relief in Bristol, Clifton and Bedminster, as well as £10 each to St. James's and St. Philip and Jacob's, and £20 to the poor of Pill.[71] In 1800 donations included 5 guineas to St. Stephen's; £20 to the poor of Pill; and £16 to the poor of Locking in Somerset, where the Society held land.[72] Help in kind was also provided in 1800 when 2 half-barrels of rice were sent to the Merchants' Almshouse and to Colston's Almshouse, and it was decided to buy £1,000 worth of grain and flour. Two barrels of rice were sent to the poor of Monkton and Beere,[73] and in November 1800 it was agreed to let Clifton parish fit up the old windmill on the common to grind corn free for the poor.[74] The next year £20 was donated to the City's Soup Committee.[75]

There were also occasional grants to hospitals. In September 1742, the Hall made an annual subscription to the Bristol Infirmary of £15, and it raised this to £20 later in the year.[76] Fifty guineas was given to the County Infirmary, Gloucestershire, in 1755; 50 guineas to the Bristol Infirmary in 1768, and 100 guineas for the erecting a County Hospital in Taunton in 1771,[77]

[69] *H.B. 5,* 23 June 1731; *H.B. 6,* 16 Sept. 1743; *H.B. 7,* 10 Sept. 1747; *H.B. 13,* p. 207, 10 May 1802.

[70] *H.B. 9,* 2 March 1767; *H.B. 10,* 14 Dec. 1775; *H.B. 11,* p. 59, 6 Feb. 1784, p. 62, 7 June 1784; *ibid.*, p. 483, 20 Jan. 1789.

[71] *H.B. 12,* p. 363, 20 Jan. 1795.

[72] *H.B. 13,* p. 132, 15 May 1800.

[73] *H.B. 13,* pp. 140, 142, 29 May 1800, 23 June 1800. For further gifts of rice, see *ibid.*, p. 167, 22 Jan. 1801.

[74] *H.B. 13,* p. 155, 7 Nov. 1800.

[75] *H.B. 13,* p. 169, 22 Jan. 1801.

[76] *H.B. 6,* 23 Sept. 1742, 9 Dec. 1742.

[77] *H.B. 8,* 24 Feb. 1755; *H.B. 9,* 10 Nov. 1768; *H.B.* 9, 8 Oct. 1771.

It would be difficult to work out precisely how much the Society provided out of its own funds for casual charitable gifts of the kind we have been examining. It probably averaged over the century between £100 and £200 a year, excluding pensions to members of the Society. As far as its own resources were concerned, the Society was a modest philanthropist compared with a man like Edward Colston, but it is essential to remember that its main purpose was not philanthropy, that its own resources were not vast, and that in any assessment of its charitable activity we must take into account something that cannot be measured in terms of money – the time and energy which it gave to administering both its own and other people's charities.

In the field of charitable activity, the major new development of the eighteenth century was the responsibility of the Society for the administration of the Seamen's Hospital Fund. The corresponding new development in educational activity took place at the beginning of the century when the Society accepted, under charitable and educational trusts of Edward Colston, the main responsibility for the Colston foundation of a hospital for 100 boys. This was on an altogether different scale from the Society's modest connection with education in the earlier period, and in the long run was to lead to the Society playing a major role in education in Bristol.[78]

It was in some ways surprising that a Society which was primarily concerned with trade should want to undertake such an activity, which was bound to involve much work, including the management of large and scattered estates. It may have been tempted by the fact that it already had a very modest connection with education, and it may have felt that the management of the charity would give it increased prestige, as well as a certain amount of patronage. It could not forsee that during the next two centuries it was going to find itself involved not only in a lot of work but also in some very unpleasant litigation.

Edward Colston is remembered in Bristol as an almost legendary figure who gave away large sums of money. In addition, he was an extremely difficult man to deal with.[79] When he was considering a large-scale educational foundation, he first of all turned to the

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[78] For a detailed exmination of the Society's educational work, see the very valuable study of Mr. D. J. Eames, "The Contribution made by the Society of Merchant Venturers to the development of education in Bristol", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis, September 1966.

[79] For some account of Colston, see H. J. Wilkins, *Edward Colston*, Bristol, 1920. The contrast between Colston the philanthropist and Colston the member of the Royal Africa Company engaged, among other things, in the slave trade, is irresistible to script-writers in search of a story. If historical evidence is missing, one can always draw on one's historical imagination.

Corporation, but the Corporation apparently declined the offer.[80] The arrangement he eventually made with the Society was to prove very unsatisfactory from a legal point of view and was to provide a number of lawyers with very satisfactory fees. He first of all undertook to put up the capital to purchase estates to the value of £18,000, estimated to produce an annual income of £850 per annum, to provide for 50 boys. He subsequently decided to provide an additional income of £600 per annum and to increase the number of boys to 100.[81] The negotiations began in 1706 and were long-drawn out and difficult, but eventually the Hospital was opened in 1710. Colston's Settlement was complicated, both in relation to the financial provisions and with reference to the management of the Hospital. Although the Society had control of the estates and of the management, its powers were shared to some extent by Nominees, appointed in the first place by Colston and subsequently by cooption. In addition, in certain circumstances the Governors of Christ's Hospital, London, could act as Visitors.[82]

Problems arose even in Colston's lifetime. When the first schoolmaster, Mr. Silvester, was dismissed in 1717, Colston suggested as his successor a man called Tocker. The Hall alleged that Tocker was a Jacobite, and without consulting Colston, it appointed as master its own Beadle, Samuel Gardiner. Colston was very angry indeed. He admitted that the Society had the right of appointment, but he complained of the Hall's lack of "common civility", and he resented "your too hasty proceedings in your election of a chief, before you had intimated to me your disapproval of the person recommended by me for that employment". It is difficult to believe that the Society's unreasonable haste was not related to its desire to give the job quickly to its own Beadle before Colston could intervene. It thus began the very unsatisfactory practice of combining the Mastership of the Hospital with the work of Collector of its own Bristol and Clifton rents, and it obviously did not do this for any reason connected with the advancement of education.[83]

Nor was Colston satisfied with the way in which the Society managed the Hospital. In 1716, at his request, the Hall set up a committee to inquire into grievances. It reported on 20 December 1716, and, among other things, it required the schoolmaster to keep a register of all the boys and a record of their indentures.[84] In his will, dated May 1720, Colston stated that although the Society was committed to visit the Hospital at least four times a year to check the standards of food and education, it had not done so. He went on to say "it hath been too apparent that for want of such inspection and care the said Boys have been so neglected by their School Master that when they were examined it was found they had made so little improvement in their Writing and Cyphering by the often absence of their Master from his School that they were not fitly qualified to be put out Apprentices . . .". In future, if the Nominees found any defects in religious education, or if the boys were bound to dissenters, they were to give notice of this, and, if necessary, to report it to the Governors of Christ's Hospital, or else seek legal remedy at the cost of his estate.[85]

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[80] Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Wilkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 44, 50–2; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 46–7.

[81] Wilkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–8; Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–6.

[82] Some of the correspondence relating to the foundation is printed in Wilkins and there are many references in the *Hall Books*. A number of printed copies of the Settlement are in the Society's archives.

[83] *H.B. 4*, 20 Dec. 1717, 3 July 1718; Wilkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–8, Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Colston died in 1721, but the difficulties over the Settlement did not die with him. There was trouble with his heirs, and a long drawn out legal dispute. In the seventeen-fifties the Society was still arguing its case against Lord Middleton, one of the heirs, over arrears of taxes, and the heirs were maintaining that as they had not been asked to pay the arrears for forty years, they were not obliged to pay now. The Society in fact admitted that it had not given proper attention to the matter and explained its neglect by saying "this heavy Debt not falling on or being out of the pocket of any particular Man was the occasion that the Accounts were not so closely looked into and settled before. If it had been in the hands of Trustees who would have been obliged to pay the debt themselves, certainly they would have taken more Care. . . ." The Hall also complained that the fee farms rents never produced the amount stated in Colston's will, but their counsel had to advise them that they had agreed with Colston that the lands were of the value stated and that they must now accept the position. He added sadly "and therefore as the Merchants have acquiesced so long without complaint,. I fear it is now too late to expect Redress in this point". On its own admission, the Society had been careless in dealing with the matter, and eventually, after an action had been brought in Chancery, the heirs settled for £3,094 7s. 3d. in 1768. It had taken nearly 50 years to get a settlement.[86]

There was also difficulty in collecting the fee farm rents settled on the Colston Charity from the Duke of Bolton's estate at Kidwelly.

[84] *H.B. 4*, 12 Dec. 1716; 20 Dec. 1716.

[85] Colston's will is printed in Wilkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–7.

[86] In one of the boxes in the Hall containing the Clerk's Papers there is an envelope with a number of documents referring to the case against Lord Middleton in the seventeen-fifties. The quotations in the text are from counsel's opinion on a case stated by the Hall. This is signed John Browning, 20 March 1748/9. For the settlement, see *H.B. 9*, 5 July 1768.

By 1748, the Duke was £1,200 in arrears and he was forced to pay up only with the greatest difficulty.[87]

As has been noted earlier,[88] the Colston Charity Account was in debt to the Society for a considerable amount throughout the period, and it was probably this fact, combined with a certain slackness in managing the estates given by Colston in his Settlement, that led to the somewhat complicated transaction by which the Society acquired in its own right the manor of Monkton in Stogursey. There was certainly no intention of defrauding the Charity, but the arrangement was questionable from a legal point of view, and in the nineteenth century, the Society's alleged ownership of the manor of Stogursey was successfully challenged in the courts.[89]

Relations between the Society and Colston's Nominees also presented problems. The Society's management came under considerable criticism from the Nominees when Samuel Gardiner, junior, was master of the Hospital.[90] There was also friction about the arrangements by which the Hall and the Nominees both nominated 50 boys for places in the Hospital. The matter came up in 1786, and in 1787 it was reported to the Hall that the Nominees had more than the 50 boys to whom they were entitled.[91] The issue was not finally settled until the nineteenth century, and then only after it had given a good deal of trouble to the Society's Treasurer, William Claxton.[92]

It is not easy to make an assessment of the Society's management of the Hospital in the eighteenth century. The practice of appointing its Beadle, who collected the rents in Clifton and Bristol, as Master of the school does not inspire confidence, and certainly as far as Samuel Gardiner junior was concerned, it left much to be desired. Latimer argued that the allowance of £10 per boy out of which the Master had to provide food, clothing and salaries for two assistant masters, meant that his profits must have been inconsiderable, and that the Society recognised this by making him beadle.[93] The argument is not valid, for in the first instance the Society had given the headmastership to a man who was already its beadle. If it did not consider that the allowance of £10 per boy was enough for the Master, it should have increased it or have argued with Colston, before it accepted the Trust, that more money was needed for the Hospital. Certainly, the Gardiners were not poor men. In the later part of the century, rising prices did indeed make things more difficult for the Master, and the Society recognised this by increasing the allowance per boy and by making a number of *ad hoc* grants to help meet the enormous expense of provisions.[94]

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[87] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 289.

[88] See p. 115.

[89] It seems more convenient to give the details of this dispute when we consider the law suit in the nineteenth century. See pp. 465–70.

[90] See pp. 109–10, 213.

[91] *H.B. II*, p. 252, 26 Sept. 1786; p. 287, 16 Jan. 1787.

[92] See pp. 363–4 and n. 40.

[93] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 287–8.

Reports on the Hospital from the Standing Committee and the Visiting Committee are not so frequent or so full as one would wish. Action was certainly taken from time to time, but one gets an impression that the Committee, like some school managers in more recent times, was inclined to leave things to the master as long as there was no serious trouble, and that its interest was intermittent. From time to time, an incident or a complaint produced a burst of activity. When various mothers and grandmothers of the boys complained about the diet in the Hospital in 1736, the Hall decided that the complaints were frivolous and unfounded.[95] In 1757 a case of leprosy was reported and a boy had to be discharged.[96] In January 1761, the Standing Committee examined a number of complaints, including one that the boys were given "stinking meat". It solemnly reported that the meat had not stunk more than three times in the last year and that "five cheeses were decayed but that they were not unfit to eat unless by some particular Boys that had a dislike to strong Cheese . . .". It was decided that "the Boy who had the care of the Cheese was to blame in not bringing down the Cheese in proper time . . .". At this time, Gardiner's management of the school was being criticised and it was alleged by the Nominees that boys were afraid to complain and were given no opportunity to do so by the ushers. That the Hall was anxious to get to the bottom of the complaints is shown by its order that the following notice be put up in the Public School Room: "It is ordered that all Boys who have any Cause of Complaint do make the same forthwith Known to the Master for the time being of the Merchants Hall in order that the same may be immediately enquired into and redressed. . . ."[97]

A few months later, the Standing Committee made a very fair report on a complaint about excessive punishment, and it rebuked Samuel Gardiner, the headmaster, for giving the impression that any boy who complained would be punished.[98]

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[94] Thus, in 1788, when Mr. Haynes, the Master, pointed out that the cost of provisions had risen and that the allowance was still only £10 a boy, the Hall raised it to £11 on the grounds that it could afford to do so since the income from the estate was up by £700 a year (*H.B. 11*, p. 468, 23 Oct. 1788). See also *H.B. 12*, p. 76, 4 Nov. 1790, *ibid.*, p. 409, 6 Nov. 1795; *H.B. 13*, p. 138, 29 May 1800; p. 174, 11 May 1801. In 1796, the Master was given a salary of £50 p.a. in addition to the allowance. See Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

[95] 8 Dec. 1736. See Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[96] *H.B. 8*, 16 Nov. 1757.

[97] *H.B. 8*, 17 Jan. 1761; 20 Jan. 1761.

[98] *H.B. 8*, 2 April 1761.

When the Standing Committee visited the Hospital in 1767, it reported that all was well but went on in effect to criticise the way in which the Hospital had been managed by noting that the dormitory had not been painted for nearly forty years and the school room for about sixteen years. The outer gates were now beyond repair, and the floor of the masters' sitting-room was much decayed. These were to be put in order, but the implication must be that someone had been negligent for a long time.[99]

Since the rules established by Edward Colston laid down that all boys must be in good health, it was occasionally necessary to remove pupils. The case of leprosy has already been noted. On 6 May 1782, order was given to remove a boy who had had a leg amputated, and on 8 September 1786 it was necessary to expel a boy who was defective in body and mind.[100] On another occasion, the Standing Committee reported that a boy with a squint had been put in by the Nominees and the Hall decided that he must be withdrawn.[101] In 1791, at a General Hall, there was a long enquiry into the pedigree of John Parsons who claimed admission as Founder's kin. It was decided that the claim had not been established.[102]

There were naturally problems of discipline among 100 boys in a boarding school, and the more serious ones eventually received attention from the Society. In 1783, "it appearing to the Committee that the Crime of running away from the School is become very prevalent", it was decided that there should be a Standing Order that anyone who ran away should not be re-admitted, as was the rule in Christ's Hospital.[103] Stern action was taken against Daniel Morgan in 1780 when Mr. Haynes reported that he had been detected in stealing a plate and that when he was called to account by the usher and was about to be punished, he "stabbed him in two places with too several Knives". It was further alleged that there was a conspiracy between Morgan and two other boys. Morgan's punishment was to be whipped by the City Beadle in the school and delivered over to serve in His Majesty's fleet. If his parents did not consent, he was to be prosecuted.[104]

There were further complaints about runaways in 1785, and there was obviously not much sympathy for George Gibbs who "ran away from the Hospital a third time and had cut his School Cloaths and made them into Trousers and was a very great Lyar". He tried to escape a fourth time and was "one of five who made an attempt to cut off the Ushers hair in the Night". The boys did not deny the charge. The Committee ordered them to be whipped by the master in its presence, to attend the Hall on Saturday and meanwhile to be kept separate and fed chiefly on bread and water. In due course, the boys were flogged and expelled in the presence of the rest "all which was done with much seriousness and cautionary advice to the rest of the boys".[105] A schoolboy's life was not a happy one in the eighteenth century, and this did not apply only in schools for poorer boys. Running away continued, and problems of discipline went on giving concern to the Society.[106] The Minutes of the Standing Committee for 10 December 1799 recorded that they "adjourned to Mr. Colstons School where they heard prayers and repremanded [*sic*] the Boys who have lately behaved ill".[107]

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[99] *H.B. 9*, 7 May 1767.

[100] Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[101] *H.B. 11*, p. 464, 16 Oct. 1788.

[102] *H.B. 12*, p. 118, 11 March 1791.

[103] *H.B. 11*, p. 40, 12 Sept. 1783. It would have been rather too much to expect the Committee to enquire further into why they ran away.

[104] *H.B. 10*, 4 Dec. 1780; 7 April 1781.

One cannot reasonably expect too much understanding of the problems of the young from eighteenth-century merchants who had found themselves so unexpectedly in charge of a Hospital for one hundred boys of the poorer classes. If their handling of the school left much to be desired by later standards, they had at least shown a reasonable amount of interest and they were prepared to give a fair hearing to complaints. The relationship which they established with the Hospital was to prove a basis for much more satisfactory developments in the nineteenth century.

In addition to managing Colston's Hospital, the Society continued to make provision for its own school for teaching poor mariners' children, which had begun much earlier.[108] There is, however, only a small amount of evidence about it. A list of pupils has survived for the year 1703. It gives their names, the date of entry and the name of the person recommending them. It shows 24 writers and cypherers, 11 readers and 6 navigators, making a total of 62 in all.[109] The schoolmaster, Christopher Wall, was dismissed in 1708 "by reason he hath neglected the Schoole and Keepes a publik house", and Thomas Haywood was admitted in his place at the usual salary and was allowed the benefit of the school house.[110] It is possible that for a time the school was run in the Master's house, for in 1722 there is a reference to the school "formerly Kept under the Hall."[111] In 1735,

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[105] *H.B. 11*, pp. 163, 170, 13 Aug. and 24 Aug. 1785.

[106] *H.B. 12*, p. 224, 10 Oct. 1792.

[107] *H.B. 13*, p. 123, 10 Dec. 1799.

[108] See pp. 18, 30, 84.

[109] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 25, 28 Oct. 1703. This is a surprisingly large number and it is a pity we do not know more about the school.

[110] *H.B. 4*, 10 June 1708.

[111] *H.B. 4*, 18 Dec. 1722. Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 230 states that in 1723 an old kitchen under the Hall was fitted up and was long used for a school as well as for a dwelling house.

Herbert Legg was admitted Master of the writing and reading school under the Hall in place of Thomas Haywood, who was dead.[112] On 26 November 1740 Joseph Rosser was appointed at a salary of 40s. which was raised to £5 in 1752.[113]

Meanwhile, the Society became involved in another educational activity.[114] Dame Susanna Holworthy had left to trustees the sum of £200 for the education of youths, and when this accumulated to £260, the trustees arranged with William Whipp, mathematician, to teach ten young men the art of a mariner. In 1733, they suggested that the Society should take over the capital of £260 and use the interest at 5 per cent to pay Whipp for instructing the boys. At the same time, the Corporation came to an arrangement with the Hall to hand over in trust the sum of £200, the accumulated capital from a legacy left by Captain John Price, R.N., in his will of 1703 for a similar purpose. In return for taking over the two legacies, the Society agreed to pay a master £20 a year to instruct boys in the art of navigation.[115] Negotiations took some time to complete, and it was not until 20 June 1737 that the Hall appointed William Ramsey master of its new Mathematical or Navigation School. Rules for the school were drawn up, and the master's salary was to begin as soon as the deeds were completed.[116] On 10 August 1738, by an indenture between the Corporation, the Society and the surviving trustees of Lady Holworthy, the Society undertook to pay £20 a year for the instruction of 20 boys to be nominated by the Hall.[117] Thus, the Society became responsible for two separate schools – its own ancient Writing School and the new Navigation or Mathematical School, each of them in the charge of separate masters. Whether both were situated under the Hall is not clear.

William Ramsey, the Master of the new school, agreed to teach 20 boys, aged 14–21. The boys were not to stay more than 18 months. A register was to be kept and the parents were to provide pen, ink, paper, compasses and Gunter's scales. Ramsey died in 1745 and was succeeded by Joseph Reynolds. He was to teach 20 boys, natives of Bristol, and if there was any deficiency in numbers it was to be made up by boys from Colston's Hospital or the City Schools. When Reynolds died, the Hall decided to bring the two schools under one master. Joseph Rosser, who was Master of the Writing School, was appointed to teach mathematics in place of Reynolds, and his total salary was thus £25 a year. In 1764, he petitioned to have his salary as master of the Writing School increased from £5 to £20, as he now had 50 boys. His salary for running the two schools thus became £40 a year.[118]

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[112] *H.B. 6*, 20 Oct. 1735.

[113] *H.B. 7*, 10 Aug. 1752.

[114] See T. J. Manchee, *The Bristol Charities*, Bristol, 1831, i, 266. Latimer's account in *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 230–1, is not entirely satisfactory.

[115] *H.B. 5*, 18 June, 1733.

[116] *H.B. 6*, 20 June 1737; 5 Sept. 1737.

[117] T. J. Manchee, *op. cit.*, i, 265–6.

William Williams was appointed master of the combined schools under the Hall in 1783.[119] He soon complained that as he had 62 boys in the school, he had no opportunity of taking paying pupils, as previous masters had done. No action was taken, and he again asked for more pay in 1785. From the point of view of the Hall's finances, it was a bad time to ask for a rise. It was pointed out to him that the master's salary had been raised on 20 September 1764 when the number in the school was 50, and that the number of boys was still the same. However, it was decided that no new boys should be admitted until the total had fallen to 40, and the figure should be kept at that number.

The school was inspected from time to time. In 1792, the master was required to make a list of boys, to report vacancies, to state which boys were learning mathematics and which were learning navigation, and to report on the progress of any boys in the school who had been to sea. Since it then appeared that no boys in the school had in fact been instructed in either mathematics or navigation, it was ordered that the objects of the school should be investigated. It seems that the Society was not in fact complying with the terms of the Holworthy-Price legacies, and it was presumably a belated recognition of this that led it to advertise the Navigation School in the Bristol papers in 1793. It looks as though the Hall, through slackness and neglect, had been using the legacies, not for the purposes for which they were intended, but to pay part of the salary of a schoolmaster who was giving an education different from that which Lady Holworthy and Captain Price had in mind.

The great development of the Society's charitable and educational work in the eighteenth century was of considerable significance in itself, but it was all the more important because it pointed the way to a future in which such activity became the main characteristic of the Merchant Venturers as they gradually lost most of their other functions.

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[118] This account of the school is based on information contained in two envelopes among the Clerk's papers dealing with the Merchants' Hall Marine School. The envelopes contain a report of a sub-committee of 30 April 1844 and various supplementary papers, one of which is entitled "Some Account of the Merchants Hall School." It is probably the result of the researches of the indefatigable nineteenth-century Treasurer, William Claxton.

[119] *H.B. 11*, p. 29, 2 May 1783.

CHAPTER 13

Miscellaneous Activities in the Eighteenth Century

To the great range of activities which has already been noted, there must be added a considerable number of miscellaneous interests. Some of these were directly connected with the economic life of Bristol, some with questions of public concern in the city and others with matters which did not immediately affect the Society but which for one reason or another attracted the attention of its members.

As we have seen, the Society gave a good deal of time to the very complicated laws regulating foreign trade and tried to influence policy at the highest level, but it was also very much concerned with the way in which the laws were administered locally. On numerous occasions, there were complaints that the customs officers were extracting extortionate fees or were interpreting the law with excessive severity. Thus, in 1703 a committee was instructed to investigate complaints that the customs officials were imposing oaths and declarations on merchants and shopkeepers contrary to the law and were taking exorbitant fees.[1] Eight years later, the committee was instructed to enquire into the abuses of the Prizage Master and of the customs officers and was empowered to draw up a petition.[2] In 1719, the Hall was told about hardship resulting from debentures being required on goods exported to Ireland. Two members were sent to London and expenses were authorised up to £50[3]. In 1727, £10 10s. was granted for the defence of a suit brought by the Duke of Cleveland against William Hart and Walter Hawksworth over prizage.[4] When William Hart complained in 1729 that the customs officers refused to make the usual allowance of £16 per hundred for the tare on currants, the Hall decided that this was an innovation and must be resisted.[5] In 1760, there was a complaint that the Commissioners of Customs required all ships laden with tobacco to unload within 30 days, and all other ships to unload within 20 days, after being entered in the Customs House. The Clerk was instructed to state a case and get legal opinion.[6] Four years later, at the request

[1] *H.B. 3*, 1 June 1703.

[2] *H.B. 4*, 11 Dec. 1711, 20 Dec. 1711.

[3] *H.B. 4*, 8 Dec. 1719.

[4] *H.B. 5*, 16 Feb. 1727.

[5] *H.B. 5*, 22 May 1729.

[6] *H.B. 8*, 9 Oct. 1760.

of a committee of London traders, the Hall petitioned against a bill which would allow no drawback on white calicoes or foreign linen exported to the colonies.[7] In 1765, when Mr. Weare complained that the importers of sugars from the French islands were unable to get their goods home in time and would now be subject to the duties imposed on French goods, Lord Clare was asked to help.[8] Many other instances could be given to show the way in which the Society was continually concerned to see that the trade regulations did not harm the interests of Bristolians. The M.P.s were kept very busy dealing with such issues.

Since the Society represented the interests of the merchants, it had little sympathy with the excise laws, which placed an obstacle on the sale of the goods they imported. In 1733, for example, at the time of Walpole's famous Excise Bill, the Hall resolved to oppose any excise on goods subject to customs duties, and, in answer to a request from London, it sent two representatives to oppose a plan to lay an excise on tobacco and rice.[9] A proposal in 1736 to put a duty of 20s. a gallon on all spiritous liquors sold by retail and a tax of £50 on retailers produced a petition claiming that it would destroy the petitioners and many thousands of His Majesty's subjects in the sugar colonies. It would end the drinking of rum punch in public houses and prevent the distilling of many thousands of hogsheads of molasses. The planters would be incapable of paying their debts; the merchants would be unable to obtain return cargoes for their ships, which were built only for that trade, and, in addition, "a great number of useful hands must loose their bread who are now employed in the refining of sugar and in distilling molasses . . .".[10]

The Hall was never at a loss for an argument and was not unduly concerned about consistency. Its anxiety in 1736 to prevent the taxation of rum-drinkers contrasts with its attitude in 1750 towards the sale of low-priced spiritous liquors, mainly gin. The Hall petitioned the Commons and reflected "with the utmost concern on the Excessive drinking of spiritous Liquors by the frequent instances of the Sudden death of his Majesty's subjects of both Sexes". It argued that "as trade in general depends on the labour, skill and industry of the people, so it is to be hoped that some effectual method will be found out to prevent the use of these pernicious liquors, the fatal effect of which amongst the lower class of his majesty's subjects tend greatly to the destruction of the commerce of the Kingdom". It added "that this intoxicating liquor is a bane to the constitution is very apparent, for drunkenness, the confessed leader to all other vices, was never so daringly known in this nation as at present".[11] In this case, public duty went hand in hand with private profit. Gin, unlike rum, did not come from the British Plantations.

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[7] *H.B. 9*, 13 March 1764.

[8] *H.B. 9*, 8 Feb. 1769.

[9] *H.B. 5*, 9 Jan. 1733; 14 March 1733; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 42.

[10] *Book of Charters 2*, 277, 3 April 1736; Minchinton, *op. cit.*, pp. 44, 45.

The attitude of the Merchant Venturers towards excise duties was admirably summed up in a petition of 1790 relating to the Tobacco Act of 1789. They stated "that they are fully convinced the laws of excise are not only hostile to our free and happy constitution, but that they depress the spirit of trade and manufacture, on which the national opulence depends, and although the revenue may derive a temporary increase from their exertion, yet it will most certainly, in the event, wholly defeat the purpose it was intended to promote . . . ".[12]

The Corn Laws, which regulated the price at which foreign corn could be imported and English corn exported, also attracted the Hall's attention in the second half of the century. In the conflict between producers and consumers of grain, the Society was on the side of the consumers, partly because merchants were importers, but mainly because it feared the possible effects of the high price of bread.[13] Thus, in 1757 it followed the example of the Corporation and petitioned the House of Commons for an extension of the time during which corn might come in duty free. Because of high prices, it was argued, "the distresses of the poor are become more and more grievous". The distilling of grain should be forbidden while the price of corn was so high.[14]

Ten years later, the members of the Society again petitioned about the high price of grain. They argued that "without some speedy and effectual relief they apprehend our commerce must inevitably decline, and our manufacturers seek an asylum in countrys that afford the necessary of life at an easier rate". The bounty on export should be reduced, distilling should be limited, and prices fixed "at a fair medium price between grower and consumer". This would check "the avaritious views and practices of ingrossers and monopolizers, ever prejudicial to the fair trader and industrious poor".[15]

The Hall made a more direct effort to meet the needs of the industrious poor in 1767 when it arranged to import on its own account 6,000 bushels from Danzic which it put up for auction at the Exchange Coffee House in lots of 25 bushels.[16] It did so again in 1768 but failed to sell the grain at an auction and eventually disposed of it elsewhere.[17]

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[11] *Book of Charters 1*, 320, March 1750; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 77–8. Minchinton suggests that the Society was at this time much under the influence of Josiah Tucker, whose *An Impartial Inquiry into . . . Low Priced Spiritous Liquors* was published in 1751.

[12] *H.B. 12*, p. 48, 12 April 1790 (11 members present); Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 168, 169. The tobacco manufacturers of Bristol had asked the Hall to help. A number of other towns also petitioned.

[13] See Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxxiii, xxxiv.

[14] *Book of Charters 2*, 340, 16 April 1757; *H.B. 8*, 16 April 1757; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 89.

[15] *Book of Petitions*, p. 22, 28 Nov. 1767; *H.B. 9*, 28 Nov. 1767; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 110.

Regulation of the corn trade was again under discussion in 1785 when the Hall successfully opposed a bill to amend the corn laws of 1773.[18] In 1789, however, there was another bill which lumped Bristol with Gloucester, Somerset and Monmouth for the purpose of calculating the average price of corn, which governed import and export. This time, the Society did not succeed, and the bill became law.[19]

There was another great flurry of activity in 1790 and 1791 when a bill was introduced which imposed the penalty of confiscation on vessels caught infringing the Corn Laws. The Hall arranged to call the Bristol corn importers together and lobbied the M.P.s but its efforts were unsuccessful.[20]

The concern of the Society with shipping and mariners in time of war has already been noted, but its interest in these matters was not confined to wartime, and a miscellaneous collection of other issues had to be dealt with. On occasions, piracy caused it considerable trouble. In the early part of the century, the Turkish pirates and the West Indian pirates were a nuisance. In 1715, for example, a petition was ordered to be sent to the King in Council about "The Sally Rovers", and in 1717 another one was prepared about "the pirotts in the West Indyes (who) doe very much obstruct our Navigacion".[21] In 1754, the Hall had to send a petition to the Admiralty asking for a cruising ship to be sent to the Barbary coast to protect Bristol merchants who were unaware that "war has been declared by a Prince of Morocco against this nation".[22]

A threat much nearer home occurred in the later seventeen-fifties. In 1758, the Society received a letter from Mr. Browne, Secretary of a Committee of Merchants and Insurers in London, who were engaged in the discovery and prosecution of piratical practices. He asked for information and help from merchants and insurers in Bristol.[23] It appears from a letter sent to the Hall by Robert Nugent that the depredations were being carried out by small vessels from Dover and Deal, which pretended to be English privateers. Nugent thought these disgraceful activities might unite the maritime powers of Europe against us, and he urged the Hall to petition in favour of a bill for manning the navy which also made provision against such acts of piracy and robbery.[24]

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[16] *H.B. 9*, 11 Feb. 1767, 4 May 1767.

[17] *H.B. 9*, 28 May 1768, 28 Sept. 1768. It apparently made a loss of £122 6s. 6d. in 1767 and a profit of £166 0s. 6d. in 1768 (*H.B. 10*, 29 June 1773).

[18] *Book of Petitions*, p. 103, 25 April 1785; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxxiii, 155, 156. The Hall argued that the bill would tend to deprive the port of Bristol of foreign supply, even in times of the greatest need, and establish a monopoly of the corn trade in the port of London.

[19] Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. xxxiii, 166, 167.

[20] *Book of Petitions*, p. 111; *H.B. 12*, p. 94, 11 Dec. 1790; p. 104, 20 Jan. 1791; p. 106, 7 Feb. 1791; p. 108, 19 Feb. 1791; p. 110, 25 Feb. 1791; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 29 A, Brickdale to the Hall; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 170–1, 172–3.

[21] *H.B. 4*, 19 Aug. 1715, 20 Feb. 1717; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 9.

[22] *H.B. 8*, 14 Sept. 1754; *Book of Charters 1*, 331.

Merchants and shipowners in the eighteenth century had good reason to fear not only for their men but also for their goods if a ship was wrecked off the English coast. In 1775, the Hall attempted to obtain legislation tightening the law concerning wrecks and making the county or hundred in which plundering took place responsible for compensation. Burke tried unsuccessfully to introduce a bill in 1775 and did in fact introduce it in 1776, when the Society petitioned in support of it.[25] There was opposition, and it failed to become law.

Another practice which the Society found objectionable was that of people taking out insurance on ships in which they had no interest, a practice known as "daggering". In 1741, it tried to get a bill passed forbidding the practice. This received a second reading, but was then counted out.[26] The Hall raised the matter again in 1746. Southwell and Hoblyn, the Bristol M.P.s thought it was unlikely to succeed unless it was introduced as a private bill for Bristol, but the necessary clause was in the end inserted in a general bill relating to insurance of ships which passed the Commons in June 1746.[27]

In the crowded eighteenth-century port, there was obviously a considerable fire risk to shipping. As we have seen, the Hall secured in 1776 an Act of Parliament requiring all combustible materials to be brought to the Merchants' Dock.[28] Its motives were mixed, but the fear was genuine. In 1777 it offered a reward of £100 for the apprehension of some incendiaries who had tried to set fire to ships and warehouses on the quay, and it ordered that watchmen should be provided by the Society to patrol the quays.[29] Two years later, the Hall was considering trying to secure a law making it a capital offence to set fire to ships in the port or to goods on the wharves.[30]

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[23] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 4, 9 Dec. 1758, Browne to the Hall; *H.B. 8*, 23 Jan. 1759.

[24] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 4, 26 March 1759, Nugent to the Hall; *Book of Charters 2*, 349, 352; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 94.

[25] *H.B. 10*, 1 April 1776; *Book of Petitions*, p. 79, 1 April 1776; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 133, 139–40.

[26] *H.B. 6*, 2 Jan. 1741; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 53, note 1.

[27] *H.B. 7*, 6 Feb. 1746; 10 Feb. 1746; 25 Aug. 1746, when it was ordered that copies of the Act to prevent daggering should be purchased; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 63, note 3. In 1748, the Standing Committee considered another bill concerning insurance (*H.B. 7*, 18 Feb. 1748).

[28] *Supra*, p. 155.

[29] *H.B. 10*, 18 Jan. 1777. For the panic caused in Bristol at this time by the

Concern about seamen was not limited simply to wartime and the pressing of men for the navy. When the merchants of London petitioned for a bill to regulate seamen in the merchant service in 1729, the Hall set up a committee to take care of the interests of Bristol.[31] When the Master read out a bill for registering seamen in 1740, the Society decided that it ought to be opposed.[32] Again in 1745, when a bill was proposed to regulate seamen's wages, the Standing Committee commented "As to the Plan for an Act to regulate the price of wages to seamen in the Merchants Service, we disapprove of the whole, as we believe it to be impracticable and prejudicial to our Liberty as well as Trade in general".[33] The Committee thought that the existing laws were quite sufficient and that the bill would put excessive power into the hands of Trinity House.[34]

Some of the members of the Society had close contact with the grievances of seamen in 1783. The *Hall Book* relates how "A great number of Seamen having assembled yesterday and paraded about the City, and threatening to unrigg several ships that now lye ready, or are getting ready, the Master ordered the Committee to be summoned, and being met, and the Sailors being assembled in Queen Square, they were informed that the Committee were ready to receive a Deputation of them, and hear their grievances". A deputation of 8 sailors attended and delivered a paper addressed to the Mayor. It stated that the wages given in the port were lower than at any other port; that foreigners were employed in preference to themselves, and that persons called lumpers were used to load and unload ships. They demanded that no foreigners should be employed; that lumpers should not be used but that instead seamen should load and unload ships at the same wages as if they were at sea; that the wages for able-bodied seamen going to Africa should be £2 5s. a month, and for all other foreign ports, £2 a month. The Committee considered the matter and then called in the deputation. The sailors were told that the Society had no power to fix wages which would bind the merchants, but that the Committee was of opinion that able-bodied seamen should have what had already been accepted by many able-bodied seamen since the peace, that is, 30s. a month. On the other hand, the Committee agreed that no foreigners should be employed while Englishmen were available and that seamen should be employed in loading and unloading in

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activity of the incendiary James Aitken, alias Jack the Painter, see Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 426–8.

[30] *H.B. 10*, 11 Feb. 1779.

[31] *H.B. 5*, 27 Feb. 1729.

[32] *H.B. 6*, 20 Feb. 1740.

[33] *H.B. 6*, 11 March 1745.

[34] *H.B. 6*, 18 March 1745.

preference to lumpers. The Society would recommend that these rules should be observed by all persons concerned with ships. The deputation was not satisfied, and one of its members declared that no work would be done on the quay. The Committee therefore thought that a copy of its proceedings should be forthwith delivered to the Mayor.[35] Perhaps it was because it recognised that unemployment might produce dangerous consequences that the Committee a short time afterwards decided that as a great number of seamen and others were out of work and in great want, they should be employed to clear mud from the new dock at the Grove.[36]

In 1795, the Society used its influence to protect the rights of seamen when a bill for regulating their wages came before Parliament. Liverpool wrote to the Mayor of Bristol, and the Hall advertised a meeting of all merchants and shipowners. Only 13 members and 4 outsiders attended. The meeting decided that it was not expedient to support the clauses in the bill limiting the rights of seamen to bring actions for the recovery of their wages. It agreed that it was desirable to prevent seamen bringing vexatious suits but did not want to do anything to hinder genuine actions in such cases.[37]

As has already been noted, the Society did a great deal to help seamen through its almshouses and through its administration of the Seamen's Hospital Fund. On a number of occasions it assisted seamen who had suffered misfortune or injustice. In 1767, for example, it took up the case of Francis Newton who had gone ransom for the brigantine *Hope* and who had then been deserted by the owner and left a prisoner in St. Malo for 7 years. The Hall ordered that a suit should be started against the owner in order to make "a publick example of such villainy". It advanced £12 2s. to Newton and granted him 7s. a week to be repaid with the other money, when he recovered damages. In 1770, it ordered that the case should be pressed "for the honour of the Nation, for the sake of justice, and for the preventing such villanous conduct in future which might in case of a Warr prove very detrimental to Trade by deterring Persons from going as Hostage". It seems that the case did not succeed, and in 1772 it was ordered that Newton should have another month's money, after which his grant was to stop. By that time, he would have received £44 16s.[38]

Another aspect of the economic life of Bristol in which the Society was interested was the services available to business men, including banking, broking and the provision of a satisfactory Exchange. As early as 1713, John Holland made "some proposalls for erecting a Bank within this Citty . . .". The Committee was ordered to confer with him, but no further action was taken.[39] Professional banking developed in Bristol from 1750 onwards and was well established by 1774 when Thomas Tyndall and other Bristol bankers drew the Society's attention to a bill which was being backed by the Bank of England and some of the London bankers. This would, it was alleged, tend "to put a stop to Merchantile Bankers and Country Banks, by preventing all Persons concerned in any other Trade from being concerned in the Banking Business . . .". The Committee thought that a letter should be sent to M.P.s "representing to them that the Banks of this City are of great Utility to the Trade, being incorporated into the Plan of Trade carried on here . . . We consider the Plan as an attempt to establish a Monopoly which is destructive of all Trade. . . ." In his letter to Clare and Brickdale, the Master pointed out that the bill put no restraint on the great evil of "jobbing in the Stocks". He stated that Bristol had four banks which were of great utility to the traders, and he added "Every lawful Trade (and such we consider the business of Bankers) ought to be free and open; we consider Monopoly and Despotism as of the same family". A petition against the bill was approved on 4 May 1774.[40]

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[35] *H.B. 11*, p. 24, 7 May 1783.

[36] *H.B. 11*, p. 33, 30 June 1783.

[37] *H.B. 12*, pp. 375–6, 30 March 1795.

[38] *H.B. 9*, 26 Oct. 1767, 9 April 1770, 8 Oct. 1772.

A fleeting attempt was made to regulate the activities of brokers in Bristol in 1729. Alderman Day pointed out that there were several laws in force in London controlling brokerage, and the Standing Committee was instructed to examine whether there should be similar regulations in Bristol. The next year, the Master produced an Act of Parliament relating to the London brokers and it was decided to apply for a similar act for Bristol at the Hall's expense. However, nothing seems to have come of this.[41]

Bristol had long remained without a satisfactory Exchange or meeting place for merchants and other business men, as the Tolzey was inadequate and exposed to the weather. Although this matter might have been considered as a special concern of the Hall, it did not take the initiative. It was first raised in the Council House in 1717, when a committee was set up by the Corporation, but nothing was done.[42] The Society was informed in November 1718 that it would be convenient for the merchants if an Exchange were built, and a committee was to report on the proposal. Again, no action followed.[43] In October 1721, a petition of merchants and shopkeepers asked the Corporation to proceed with the matter, and the Corporation decided to obtain a private Act and to pay half the costs. A new committee of the Corporation was established, and in October the Hall set up its own committee. An Act was in fact obtained in 1722, but there was opposition in Bristol, and again the matter lapsed.[44] With a sudden burst of energy in 1732, the Corporation bought various buildings for the site with borrowed capital, but then little more was done until 1739, when more property was purchased. At this point, the Society decided to give £2,000 as a free gift towards the cost, which already amounted to nearly £20,000. The foundation stone was laid in March 1741, and on 21 September 1743 the Society and the boys from Colston's Hospital took part in the grand opening ceremony.[45]

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[39] *H.B. 4*, 28 April 1713.

[40] *H.B. 10*, 23 Feb. 1774; *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 23 Feb. 1774, the Master to Clare and Brickdale; *Book of Petitions*, p. 59; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 127, 128.

[41] *H.B. 5*, 13 Feb. 1729, 24 Feb. 1730.

[42] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 118.

[43] *H.B. 4*, 17 Nov. 1718.

The new Exchange was not in fact very popular with the business community, which was far more concerned with another matter – the postal service. There are a great many references in the Society's records to this question throughout the century. A few examples will serve to show the Hall's activity. In 1721, for example, it petitioned the King to take steps to prevent the frequent robbery of the mails, and in 1731 the Standing Committee was instructed to enquire into the irregularity of the London posts.[46] In 1748, it sent to the Postmaster General a request that packets of Bristol letters should be made up in Dublin and on arrival at Chester should go by the west country post direct to Bristol and not via London. Foreign letters arriving at Falmouth should also go direct and not through London. Mr. Fane, M.P. for Bristol, reported to the Hall that he had seen Mr. Allen near Bath and that he had no objection to the Irish mails going direct to Bristol, but that the Postmaster General would not agree to allow this to be done with foreign letters, because the government might need to open them, particularly in time of war.[47]

In 1767, the wardens wrote to Lord Clare expressing concern about a proposed alteration in the postage laws which would free postmasters from the duty of delivering letters at the houses of persons to whom they were addressed and asked him to use his influence against the bill. It nevertheless became law.[48] At the same time, the Society was petitioning to get a branch added to the Bristol post to provide a regular connection with Glastonbury, Somerton, Langport, Ilminster and Chard, with which there was a considerable trade.[49] Two years later, as a result of a letter from Lord Clare, the Hall was trying to get an improvement in the post between Bristol and Bath and between Bristol and Chester.[50] It complained that packets for America and the West Indies were frequently detained in London longer than the day advertised in the *Gazette*. Londoners were informed about the delay, but other ports were not, and it wanted the Postmaster General to advise Bristol from time to time about the latest date for despatch.[51]

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[44] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 118, 119; *H.B. 4*, 23 Oct. 1721.

[45] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 180, 218, 226, 247; *H.B. 6*, 12 Oct. 1739, 16 Feb. 1743. The total cost was nearly £50,000.

[46] *H.B. 4*, 23 Oct. 1721; *H.B. 5*, 14 Dec. 1731; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 13.

[47] *H.B. 7*, 10 Nov. 1748, 16 Nov. 1748.

[48] *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 6 June 1767, the Warden to Lord Clare. The Act was 7 George III c. 50. See Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 108.

Bad postal service to London and to Bath were again the subject of complaint in 1773, when the Society also requested that there should be a daily penny post to Bath. The Secretary to the General Post Office wrote to the Master, Joseph Daltera, regretting that it was impossible to establish a penny post to Bath. He apologised for the bad service and assured him that negligent postmasters "will be constantly wrote to".[52] The next year, the Mayor and several merchants asked the Hall to join in an application to the Postmaster General that all mails for Bristol should be made up abroad and sent direct from Falmouth, paying the same rates as if they went through London. This was referred to a committee.[53] There was yet another complaint about bad posts to Bath in 1782.[54]

In the seventeen-eighties John Palmer developed, in the face of very considerable opposition from within the Post Office, a system of fast, well-guarded mail coaches. Costs were higher, but the customer who used the service got increased speed and security. Both the Corporation and the Society appreciated Palmer's work and petitioned in support of him.[55]

The Society also showed some concern for improved communications in and around Bristol, but its interest tended to be sporadic, and it did not show quite as much awareness of the importance of the problem as might have been expected from an organisation so deeply involved with the prosperity of the port. It does not seem to have played any part as a corporate body in furthering the Act of 1727 which set up Turnpike Trustees consisting of the M.P.s for Bristol, Gloucestershire and Somerset, the J.P.s of the two shires, the members of the Corporation and a number of local gentry who were given powers to levy tolls, nor was it concerned with the Act of 1749 which extended the powers of the Trustees.[56] In 1749, when the Corporation agreed to lend two-thirds of the sum of £500 required for turnpike roads, the Hall was willing to lend the other third, but when the Corporation later changed its mind about the loan, so did the Hall.[57] On the other hand, the Society showed considerable interest in the development of roads affecting its property at Clifton and Hotwells, and it made a number of grants to help the making of roads elsewhere. Thus, in 1763 it cooperated with the Turnpike Commissioner when they widened and lowered the road from Bristol over Totterdown to Bath and it gave up some of its land for this purpose, provided the Commissioners agreed to erect a substantial wall.[58] In the same year, it donated 20 guineas to repair the road from Rownham to Pill and 10 guineas to repair the road from Portishead Point to Portishead Passage.[59] In 1764, the Hall contributed 10 guineas towards making a road from Stoke in Westbury to Sea Mills, 20 guineas to Thomas Goldney for work on a road from the Three Tuns in Clifton up Clifton Hill, and 100 guineas to the parish of St. Nicholas to help with the cost of opening a way from St. Nicholas Street to the Back.[60] In 1766, it gave £30 for work on a retaining wall at Totterdown, which was very dangerous, and three years later it donated 20 guineas to rebuild the wall, which had fallen down the previous year.[61] It approved the Turnpike Commissioners' request in 1773 to take down three or four large trees in front of Mr. Goldney's house in Clifton to widen the road,[62] and it repaired the road from Rownham to the Limekilns in 1792, making it clear that it did not accept any obligation to do so.[63] When the Treasurer of the Brislington Road was unable to get any quarries to sell him stone in 1798, the Society offered him the use of one of its own quarries.[64] On the other hand, when a bill was introduced for the repair of Over's Causeway leading from Gloucester towards Maismore, for altering the bridge over the Severn near the Westgate and for paving and cleansing the streets of Gloucester, the Hall opposed it because these improvements were to be paid for by levying a toll on vessels passing under Westgate Bridge.[65]

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[49] The initiative came from Mr. Combe who informed the Hall on 11 Feb. 1767 that a petition was ready and asked the Society to support it with a Memorial. *H.B. 9*, 11 Feb. 1767, 5 June 1767; *Book of Petitions* p. 16, February 1767; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 108.

[50] *H.B. 9*, 8 Feb. 1769.

[51] *H.B. 9*, 21 Oct. 1769.

[52] *H.B. 10*, 16 Jan. 1773; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 17, two letters from Anthony Toad, Secretary to the General Post Office, to Daltera.

[53] *H.B. 10*, 12 Feb. 1774.

[54] *H.B. 10*, 13 May 1782.

[55] For the posts in Bristol at this time and Palmer's contribution, see Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 457–9; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 153, note 2; *H.B. 11*, p. 113, 12 Feb. 1785.

The improvement of Bristol's own bridge did not rouse much interest in the Hall, and the Society did not participate in the fierce controversy in the later seventeen-fifties over the proposal to replace the medieval structure by a modern bridge.[66] When the Town Clerk hopefully informed the Hall about the difficulty in raising funds and appealed for help, the Society suggested that possibly the money might be raised by an increase in the wharfage rates, but it did not offer to help from its own resources.[67] The Corporation nevertheless secured an Act in 1760, and after protracted disputes the new bridge was opened for general traffic in November 1768. In 1768, the Bridge Trustees applied for another Act giving them further powers to improve the approach from Temple Street. There was opposition in Bristol, and, somewhat ill-advisedly, the Society intervened in a petition to the Commons, maintaining "That they from the general and Known characters of the trustees have not the least suspicion that they have been guilty of mismanagement, and from the enquiry that they have made they cannot find that they have been guilty of any."[68] In 1793, largely as a result of the way in which the Bridge Trustees handled the bridge tolls, there were serious riots in which 11 people were killed and nearly 50 injured.[69] The tolls were brought to an end by the efforts of a number of citizens who raised a subscription to buy out the lessees. The question then arose as to what the Bridge Trustees should do with the funds they had in hand for lighting, cleaning and repairing the bridge. They wished to hand them over to the Corporation and the Society, and there was a discussion about whether the Society had an obligation to accept the trust under the Bridge Act of 1786. Eventually the Corporation and the Merchant Venturers agreed to accept the sum as joint trustees.[70]

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[56] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 155 ff., 274 ff.

[57] *H.B. 7*, 16 Jan. 1749, 26 June 1749.

[58] *H.B. 9*, 28 June 1763.

[59] *H.B. 9*, 20 Oct. 1763.

[60] *H.B. 9*, 19 March 1764.

[61] *H.B. 9*, 21 Oct. 1769.

[62] *H.B. 10*, 15 Dec. 1773.

[63] *H.B. 12*, p. 235, 7 Nov. 1792, see also pp. 187–9.

[64] *H.B. 13*, p. 44, 30 Jan. 1798.

[65] *H.B. 10*, 10 April 1777; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 142, 143.

The Society's concern about improving river navigation and developing canals was also fairly limited, apart from proposals concerning the river Avon. In 1763, the Hall cooperated in a scheme to make an accurate plan of the Avon from Bath to Chippenham and Tytherington with a view to obtaining an estimate of the cost of making it navigable. It provided 50 guineas to enable Ferdinando Stratford to make a plan and section.[71] It put up another £100 in November 1764 and also gave Stratford 25 guineas. He undertook to provide a fair copy of his plan and an estimate to put before parliament by Christmas 1764. In January 1765, the Hall ordered that his plan should be framed and hung up in the Exchange Coffee House. His estimate was to be printed and distributed free. The Corporation resolved to apply for an Act to make the river navigable to Chippenham, but there was fierce opposition in Wiltshire, and the scheme was abandoned early in 1766.[72]

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[66] For the bridge, see Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol*, pp. 114 ff.; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 334 ff.

[67] *H.B. 8*, 16 Jan. 1759, 23 Jan. 1759.

[68] *H.B. 11*, p. 218, 11 May 1786, p. 231, 24 May 1786; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 106, 107, 11 May 1786; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 157.

[69] For Latimer's strictures on the Bridge Trustees, see *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 501 ff.

[70] *H.B. 12*, p. 359, 1 Jan. 1795, p. 388, 2 July 1795; p. 409, 6 Nov. 1795, p. 427, 23 Jan. 1796, p. 452, 26 Dec. 1797.

[71] *H.B. 9*, 3 May 1763.

Quite early in the Canal Age, the Society showed an interest in a scheme backed by Mr. Archer, M.P. for Warwick, who attended the Hall and gave details of a plan to make a canal from Coventry to Warwick and thence to Stratford on Avon, which was already linked with Bristol. He argued that the proposal would "counter-act those advantages which the Town of Liverpool (the Rival in Trade of this City) would otherwise have over this City by the new inland Navigations opened in the Northward parts of the Kingdom". He promised to let the Society know when the plans were ready, but there were no further developments.[73]

Two canal schemes came under consideration in 1775. In March, the Hall agreed to support a bill in the House of Commons for a canal from Stourbridge to Stourton to link with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. This proposal ran into opposition and was postponed. The Hall had asked Henry Cruger to support it, and this placed him in some difficulty as he was backing a rival scheme. He hastened to explain that if the bill had gone on, he would have supported it, because his friends in Bristol expected to benefit from it. He assured the Hall that "notwithstanding it always gives me Pain as a *Man* to impair or injure the private interests of Individuals, yet as a *Member of the Community* (who prefers the greater to the inferior good), I must have promoted the *public Interests*, tho' it might unfortunately have interfered with that of a few private Persons . . .".[74] The bill was, however, reintroduced at the end of 1775, when the Society again petitioned in favour of it, and it became law in 1776.[75] The other proposal put forward in 1775 was to make the river Stroudwater navigable from Framiload on the Severn to Walbridge near Stroud. By 25 votes to 8, the Hall decided to give its support.[76]

On the other hand, little interest was shown in the proposed Kennet and Avon Canal. When a public meeting in Marlborough Castle was called in 1788 to discuss a navigation which would make a better link between Bristol and London, the Standing Committee expressed the view that there would not be enough traffic to make the canal pay.[77] The scheme was postponed for a time, and when the matter came up in 1789, a meeting at which only 14 members were present decided not to contribute towards the cost of a survey.[78]

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[72] *H.B. 9*, 7 Nov. 1764, 14 Jan. 1765; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 369, 370.

[73] *H.B. 9*, 23 Sept. 1767.

[74] *H.B. 10*, 30 March 1775; *Book of Petitions*, p. 69, 30 March 1775; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 19, 7 April 1775, Cruger to the Hall.

[75] *Book of Charters 2*, 71, 14 Dec. 1775; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 134, 135.

[76] *H.B. 10*, 2 Dec. 1775, 14 Dec. 1775; *Book of Petitions*, p. 70, 12 Dec. 1775.

There must, however, have been some uneasiness about the extent to which Bristol was losing ground to its rivals, and in 1791 support was given to a petition for a canal from Birmingham to Worcester which, it was argued, would be "the means of opening a certain and immediate communication between the port of Bristol and the North and several intermediate points . . .".[79] The bill became law, and the Hall kept an eye on the scheme. In 1794, when it was informed about a meeting of the proprietors, it decided it could not attend itself but that every opportunity should be taken of opposing any proposed diminution in the size of the canal.[80]

In 1793, there was only lukewarm support for the proposed Berkeley–Gloucester Canal. The Society did not back it, but decided that "the Citizens at large" should be informed by advertisement and that petition forms should be left at the Council House.[81] It subsequently asked for postponement of the scheme on the grounds that other plans were under consideration for making "an inland communication" for Bristol to the Severn "above the dangerous parts of it" and that there was also a proposal to link Bristol with Taunton. It was particularly anxious to prevent the proprietors of the Berkeley–Gloucester Canal from obstructing these much more sweeping proposals.[82] The bill, nevertheless, obtained the royal assent.[83]

The proposed Bristol–Taunton or Western Canal referred to above was formally brought to the attention of the Standing Committee at the end of 1795. Early in 1796, the Hall decided to petition in favour of it, and a petition was actually drawn up. It does not seem to have been presented, presumably because the scheme never got off the ground.[84]

It seems clear that the Society's interest in canals was limited, and that its failure to give a really effective lead in the development of the port cannot be explained in terms of a great concern for

[77] *H.B. 11*, p. 441, 5 July 1788.

[78] *H.B. 11*, p. 467, 23 Oct. 1788; p. 549, 9 Nov. 1789.

[79] *H.B. 12*, pp. 118–19, 11 March 1791; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 116–18; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 177.

[80] *H.B. 12*, p. 318, 8 Jan. 1794.

[81] *H.B. 12*, p. 264, 25 Feb. 1793.

[82] *Book of Petitions*, p. 122, 25 Feb. 1793, pp. 123–4; *H.B. 12* p. 273, March 1793; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 181, 182.

[83] 33 George III c. 97.

[84] *H.B. 12*, p. 421, 19 Nov. 1795; p. 424, 26 Dec. 1795 when the 12 members present decided to leave it to the Standing Committee to make a decision; p. 428, 25 Feb. 1796; *Book of Petitions*, p. 125, 25 Feb. 1796; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 183, 184.

developing inland communications. In neither case did it show much initiative, and its cautious and conservative attitude was one of the many factors which explain the relative decline of the port of Bristol.

The Society was mainly concerned with the economic life of the city, but it also used its influence from time to time in other directions. It gave its support to the Corporation in 1754 and 1755 over a bill to establish a more satisfactory body of watchmen. The bill was highly controversial, not because there was opposition to law and order among the propertied classes, but because there was great reluctance to placing this enlarged police force under the control of the unpopular Corporation. A number of people claiming to speak for the principal merchants and traders argued that the Corporation did not represent the inhabitants of Bristol. On this occasion, the Society came to the aid of the establishment and argued in its petition that the Mayor and Aldermen were "the most proper persons to be invested with power to regulate and support a nightly watch . . .".[85]

On occasions, the Hall made gifts to improve the amenities of Bristol. When the Corporation decided in 1731 to give £500 towards the cost of a statue of William III, the Hall agreed to give £300, and the project was managed by a committee of 3 members of the Corporation, 3 Merchant Venturers and 3 of the general subscribers. The result was Rysbrack's fine equestrian statue in Queen Square.[86] There had been an earlier proposal to give £100 for an equestrian statue of George II. Latimer states that this was "insidiously made" by the Tories, and it was turned down by the Hall.[87] In 1775, when the Corporation voted £800 towards purchasing houses and land between the void ground opposite Denmark Street and the drawbridge to lay out as an open space, the Society also voted £800.[88] The next year, it donated £100 for the expense of taking down the gate and buildings at the bottom of Small Street.[89] Thirty guineas was donated to repair the walks on College Green in 1780, and £200 to help with improvements in St. Stephen's parish in 1795.[90]

The Society was not a great patron of learning or of the arts, but it made occasional donations. It showed some interest in the Bristol

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[85] *H.B. 8*, 24 Feb. 1755; *Book of Charters 2*, 332, 1 Feb. 1755; *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 1 Feb. 1755, the Society to Nugent and Beckford; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 83, 84; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 311 ff.

[86] *H.B. 5*, 14 Dec. 1731; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 178.

[87] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 179.

[88] *H.B. 10*, 1 April 1776.

[89] *H.B. 10*, 25 May 1776. For the extensive clearances under an Act of 1776 see Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 368, 369, 408.

[90] *H.B. 10*, 8 Nov. 1780; *H.B. 12*, p. 422, 26 Dec. 1795.

Library which had originally been established as a free library for the citizens of Bristol in 1613. This underwent a number of vicissitudes. In 1740, it was rebuilt by the Corporation, and Benjamin Donn acted as librarian and also ran a mathematics school in the premises. In 1772, a number of citizens formed a Bristol Library Society and obtained from the Corporation the use of the premises for their own subscription library. Donn was dismissed, a new librarian was appointed, and the Library Society in effect took over what had been intended to be a free library.[91] The Hall gave £20 to the library in 1773 and again in 1775.[92] The next year, the Society contributed £100 towards the cost of taking down a stable and coach house in front of the building which the Corporation had allowed Ezekiel Longman to erect in 1728.[93] From 1777, it paid an annual subscription of £10, provided the Master, Wardens and Treasurer might enjoy the privileges of membership.[94]

Some patronage was also given to makers of maps and plans. Thus, the Hall agreed in 1744 to subscribe 20 guineas to Murdoch McKenzie's survey of the Orkneys and in 1771 Captain Nicholas Pocock received the same amount for a chart of the coast of North and South Carolina.[95] Benjamin Donn was given 20 guineas in 1767 for his survey of the country around Bristol, and in 1773 the Hall subscribed for 8 copies of Darch and Day's proposed map of Somerset.[96] On the other hand, when the Master laid before the Committee a letter from Benjamin Donn enclosing a Plan of the City of Bristol lately published by him which he wanted to present to the Society, it was decided not to accept it. The Clerk, Samuel Worrall, sent Donn a very curt letter saying "Sir, the Master having laid before the Committee your letter of November 11th with a plan lately published by you of the City of Bristol, the Committee have ordered me to return it to you." Donn had been dismissed as Librarian of the free library and was about to leave Bristol to open an academy near Taunton, and there may well have been some bad feeling between him and the Library Society which the Hall patronised.[97] Later, there must have been a reconciliation, for Donn received 10 guineas from the Hall in 1784 for his map of the Western Circuit.[98]

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[91] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 210, 403.

[92] *H.B. 10*, 13 Sept. 1775; 30 Sept. 1773.

[93] *H.B. 10*, 1 April 1776; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 403.

[94] *H.B. 10*, 13 Aug. 1777.

[95] *H.B. 6*, 11 Sept. 1744; *H.B. 9*, 18 Feb. 1771.

[96] *H.B. 9*, 11 May 1767.

[97] *H.B. 10*, 15 Dec. 1773; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 18, Donn to the Hall, 11 Nov. 1773; *Letter Book 1747–1780*, 15 Dec. 1773, Worrall to Donn.

[98] *H.B. 11*, p. 74, 26 Aug. 1784.

Patronage of art and architecture was small. The contribution to Rysbrack's statue of William III had a political and not an aesthetic purpose, and the decision to make all the portraits in the Hall of uniform length suggests a certain philistinism.[99] Good luck as well as good judgement probably played a part in the selection of Paty for work on the reconstruction of the Hall, and the contribution of £20 to Nicholas Pocock for his print of the battle of 12 April 1782 between Rodney and de Grasse was not made simply on the grounds of artistic merit.[100] The fine Georgian buildings which went up on the Society's property in Clifton owed much to the generally high architectural ability of the age and to the fact that the Hall was anxious to maintain property values.

In an age when there was considerable technical development, one might perhaps have expected the Society to show interest in inventions, particularly in relation to the sea, but little seems to have been done. When the Earl of Halifax sent down Mr. Isaac Stillingfleet with a model of Dr. Hales' ventilation for ships, the Hall gave him 20 guineas for his pains during his month's stay in Bristol, and Benjamin Donn received some help with an invention to record more accurately the height of the tide at Bristol Bridge, but in general the merchants do not seem to have been technically minded.[101] As merchants, they had obvious reasons for the support they gave in 1783 to petitions that Richard Arkwright's patent for the manufacture of cotton should not be renewed.[102]

Other matters of more than local interest in which the Society was involved in the eighteenth century included a petition in 1748 to colonise a large tract of land near Nova Scotia, which the Society supported,[103] and a bill in 1751 to naturalise foreign Protestants. Although both the Corporation and the Society petitioned in support of foreign Protestants, there was a counter-petition from the Tory Steadfast Society which claimed that "not more than 40 individual persons" in Bristol had consented to the petitions. There was strong opposition in London and the bill was withdrawn before its third reading.[104] The Society took a much less liberal attitude with regard to the Jews. An Act of 1753 permitted the naturalisation of individual Jews by private Act of Parliament without their having to receive the sacrament.[105] It was intended to encourage the immigration of rich foreign Jews. There was an outburst of anti-Jewish feeling in the country. In Bristol, the Corporation did not join in, but most of the Bristol press was hostile to the Act, the Steadfast Society helped whip up popular feeling, and the Society petitioned for the repeal of the Act. It informed the M.P.s of its unanimous resolution and asked them to use their utmost endeavours to get the Act repealed.[106] In the face of widespread opposition, the Government gave way, and the repeal bill received the royal assent on 20 December 1753.[107]

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[99] See p. 111.

[100] *H.B. 11*, p. 48, 28 Oct. 1783.

[101] *H.B. 9*, 24 April 1769, 15 May 1771; *H.B. 7*, 31 Jan. 1750.

[102] *H.B. 11*, p. 15, 6 March 1783; *Book of Petitions*, p. 99, 6 March 1783; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 25, contain copies of a petition for the merchants of Lancaster with 48 signatures; from Liverpool (68 signatures) and from Manchester (no signatures). The patent was not in fact renewed. See Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 152.

[103] *H.B. 7*, 20 Oct. 1748.

[104] *H.B. 7*, 23 Feb. 1751; *Book of Charters 2*, 321, March 1751; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 78.

Among these miscellaneous interests must also be included a petition in 1731 and 1732 for the more effective recovery of debts in the American colonies;[108] assistance in the cost of transporting disbanded soldiers and sailors to Ireland after the end of the war in 1763;[109] a request to Burke in 1777 that in any proposal to place a tax on goods sold by auction, he should try to get exempted the goods of bankrupts and goods taken from wrecks or from vessels damaged by the sea;[110] and a protest in 1797 that a bill regulating the place of trial of certain actions would result in cases being heard by Somerset juries who did not understand intricate mercantile questions and who were wholly unacquainted with shipping and navigation.[111]

Other matters which attracted the attention of the Hall included an investigation of the charges made at Rownham Ferry;[112] bills for regulating salmon fishing in the river Severn;[113] the enclosure of Locking Moor in Somerset;[114] presentation to the vicarage of Locking; [115] the attempt of the Reverend Richard Wilkins to interfere with Sunday work by the pilots at Pill;[116] and "An anonymous Hand Bill from the working Shipwrights . . . by which there is reason to apprehend an illegal Combination for the increase of wages. . . ."[117]

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[105] 26 George II c. 26. See P. T. Underdown, "The Parliamentary History of the City of Bristol, 1750–1790", unpublished London M.A. thesis, 1948, pp. 20–1; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 80; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 299.

[106] *H.B. 8*, 10 Nov. 1753, 12 Nov. 1753; *Letter Book 1747–1780*; 12 Nov. 1753, Nathaniel Foy to Edward Southwell and Robert Hoblyn.

[107] 27 George II c. 1.

[108] *H.B. 5*, 14 Dec. 1731; *Book of Charters 2*, 269, 270; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 35, 36.

[109] *H.B. 9*, 20 June 1764.

[110] *H.B. 10*, 24 May 1777.

[111] *Book of Petitions*, p. 126, 27 April 1797; Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 184–6.

[112] *H.B. 13*, p. 104, 1 Aug. 1799.

[113] *H.B. 10*, 3 March 1778; *Book of Petitions*, p. 87, 3 March 1778.

[114] *H.B. 13*, p. 124, 17 Jan. 1800; p. 131, 15 May 1800.

[115] See, for example, *H.B. 10*, 30 Oct. 1781; *H.B. 13*, p. 47, 30 Jan. 1798.

[116] *H.B. 12*, p. 99, 30 Dec. 1790; p. 106, 7 Feb. 1791.

[117] *H.B. 12*, p. 345, 23 Oct. 1794.

From what has been said about the great range of activities in which the Society was engaged in the eighteenth century, it is clear that the agenda at its meetings did not lack variety and interest, but it is probable that the Society weakened its effectiveness by operating simultaneously on so many different fronts. The economic problems which it dealt with were growing in number and complexity, and at the same time it had to handle a mass of business relating to its charitable and educational work and to its property. Moreover, the great variety of business had to be conducted by the relatively small number of members who played an active part in its organisation. Concern for detail must have weakened its efficiency as a policy-making body. It was conservative in its outlook and inclined to cooperate whenever possible with the small lethargic oligarchy which governed Bristol. It included within its ranks only part of the mercantile and business interests and it was content to allow other groups to do some of the things which it was unable or unwilling to do itself.

CHAPTER 14

The Society and Other Organisations in Eighteenth-Century Bristol

THE task of looking after the economic interests of Bristol in the eighteenth century was not solely the responsibility of the Society of Merchant Venturers. The expansion of the economy nationally and locally meant there was a great deal more to be done than in the earlier period, and since the Society had so much on hand, it was not surprising that other specialised groups emerged to deal with particular issues. These groups were not trying to compete with the work of the Hall but to complement it, and the Society was often willing to help them. Nevertheless, their emergence suggests that the Merchant Venturers were leaving to others some of the responsibilities which previously they would have been anxious to keep in their own hands. It also indicates that some of the merchants thought they could better achieve their objectives outside the Society, and this meant that the Hall could not claim to speak for the whole merchant community.

The two most important fields in which the Society relinquished some of its control were in the African trade and the West Indian trade. As has already been noted, from 1750 onwards there existed in Bristol a local branch of the African Company which elected annually three representatives of the national executive of nine which sat in London. Although the Society gave a considerable amount of help to the African Company at local and national level, the Act of 1750 had in effect deprived it of effective control of a very important branch of Bristol's commerce. The Bristol branch of the African Company had many more members than the Society of Merchant Venturers and was controlled by a national executive in London.[1]

The Bristol branch of the African Company had been brought into existence by national legislation, but a separate organisation for merchants interested in the very important West Indian trade seems to have developed spontaneously. In 1777 the merchants formed their own local West India Club in the same way as West Indian merchants had done in London, Glasgow and Liverpool. It would seem that this was primarily for social purposes but that it had some economic functions and that it was in contact with West India Societies in other towns. The first Bristol Club was short-lived, but early in 1782 a number of gentlemen interested in the trade met at the Bush Tavern and decided to form a new society on the same lines as the old one.[2] Of the 16 original members, only half were Merchant Venturers. The Proceedings of the Society show that it was concerned with a number of economic issues, including averages charged on cargoes; arrangements for convoys in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars; duties on sugar; freight charges; opposition to demands for increased wages by seamen and shipwrights; regulation of the Irish trade; brokerage charges; import duties on rum; duties on French brandy, and the tax on sugar. The impression given by its *Proceedings* is that it was a vigorous organisation which fought hard for the interests of those concerned with this very valuable trade. During the French Wars, it seems to have done very much more than the Merchant Venturers in demanding convoys for the West India fleet. It was open to merchants who were not Merchant Venturers and it operated separately from that Society. Its *Proceedings* show that its members dined with each other and engaged in a certain amount of betting. Possibly its meetings were more attractive than those held in the Merchants' Hall.

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[1] See p. 133.

In addition to these two formally-constituted societies, there were in eighteenth-century Bristol other informal groups concerned with economic issues and acting from time to time on their own initiative, although sometimes asking the Hall for help. In 1731, for example, the Society was informed that the merchants and others in the city had petitioned the House of Commons about the depredations of the Spaniards who had behaved "in a barbarous and cruell manner" towards Bristol ships. The Hall was asked to give support and to make a contribution towards the cost of raising the matter in London, and it agreed to pay £156 2s. 6¾d.[3] In 1749, the Society received a request for assistance from "divers merchants dealing from iron" who were supporting a bill for the import of pig and bar iron in America, and again it agreed to support the petitioners.[4] Two years later, a Mr. King attended the Hall on behalf of several persons concerned in the export of spiritous liquor and was promised help in connection with the attempt to get a drawback from the customs.[5] In 1774, the Mayor and several merchants requested the Hall to join in an application to the Postmaster General that all foreign mail for Bristol should be made up abroad and sent to Bristol direct from Falmouth,[6] and in the same year support was given to the Bristol bankers in their opposition to a bill to prevent persons in trade from being concerned with banking business.[7]

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[2] See Lilian M. Penson, "The Bristol West India Club", *The West India Committee Circular*, 13 May 1920, pp. 132–5. The Proceedings of the second Bristol West India Society and a number of papers relating to its business are in the Merchants' Hall not because the association was part of the Society of Merchant Venturers but because William Claxton, Treasurer of the Merchant Venturers from 1841 to 1873, was also Treasurer of the West India Society which went on until it was wound up in the mid-nineteenth century. Presumably this is how the records came to be in the Hall.

[3] *H.B. 5*, 23 Feb. 1731.

[4] *H.B. 7*, 20 March 1750, 22 March 1750. See also *H.B. 8*, 19 Jan. 1757.

Other groups which were in contact with the Society included 9 merchants trading to America who asked the Master to call a Hall in 1774 to take into account their proposals concerning the state of the American trade;[8] the sugar refiners;[9] the Marine Society;[10] the tobacco manufacturers;[11] the Captains' Society;[12] and the corn importers who were asked in 1791 to appoint a committee to confer with the Hall about the Corn Laws.[13]

The Society of Merchant Venturers was aware that it did not include within its ranks all the merchants of Bristol and that on occasions it was desirable to consult by one means or another what it referred to on a number of occasions as "the Merchants at large". Thus, when the Society received a letter in 1748 from one of the M.P.s about the proposed scheme for regulating the African trade, it sent copies not only to all its members but also to traders to Africa who were not free of the Hall. A copy was left in the Coffee House and all merchants and traders were invited to give their views.[14] Such attempts to consult non-members became more common in the later part of the century, possibly because the Society realised its own limitations as spokesman for the whole mercantile body of Bristol. As has been noted earlier, when the abolition of the slave trade became a burning issue in 1789, the Society advertised a public meeting in the Hall on 13 April 1789. This was attened by "a very numerous and respectable Body of Merchants, Manufacturers and others residing in the City and its neighbourhood", and this meeting established a large Committee, of which rather less than half were

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[5] *H.B. 7*, 26 Aug. 1751. [6] *H.B. 10*, 12 Feb. 1774. [7] See pp. 225, 409.

[8] Society's *Letters*, bdle. 19, 24 Nov. 1774, letter to the Society signed by 9 merchants. See also *H.B. 11*, p. 547, 9 Nov. 1789, for another occasion on which the merchants trading to America asked for help.

[9] *H.B. 10*, 26 Feb. 1780.

[10] *H.B. 8*, 24 March 1757 and 24 May 1757 when the Merchant Venturers opposed the formation of such a society in Bristol; *H.B. 11*, p. 169, 20 Aug. 1785 when the Marine Society was allowed to hold its general and other meetings in the Hall.

[11] *H.B. 12*, p. 48, 12 April 1790. Several tobacco manufacturers attended with grievances about a late Act of Parliament. The Hall decided to petition.

[12] There are many references to the Captain's Society which invested its funds with the Society. See, for example, *H.B. 11*, p. 304, 28 May 1787, when the Hall borrowed £1,700 at 4 per cent.

[13] *H.B. 12*, p. 104, 20 Jan. 1791. [14] *H.B. 7*, 6 Feb. 1748.

Merchant Venturers, to organise the opposition of the six petitions against abolition presented to the House on 12 May 1789, three came from this Committee, one from the Corporation, one from the Newfoundland Merchants and one from the Society.[15]

Another example of the Society's efforts to attract wider support occurred in the same year when the Hall inserted an advertisement in the newspapers inviting the attendance of those interested in American customs duties. This was attended by "Several of the Merchants at large".[16] Many "merchants at large" attended another meeting in the Hall on 4 January 1790 concerning customs duties on ships carrying spirits.[17] Another public meeting was called in the Hall in 1792 to discuss a proposed alteration in the hours of opening of the Customs House. Eight people turned up, but they cannot have received a very good impression of the vitality of the Society, since only seven Merchant Venturers were present and there were insufficient members to constitute a quorum.[18] Again, in 1795 when a bill to regulate seamen's wages was before Parliament, the Society called by advertisement a general meeting of merchants and shipowners. Only 13 Merchant Venturers attended, of whom all except one were members of the Standing Committee, and only four outsiders thought it worthwhile to attend.[19] On 6 June 1797 when the fleet had mutinied, only 8 Merchant Venturers, all of them belonging to the Standing Committee, were present at a General Hall which decided to call on 10 June a meeting of merchants, shipowners and underwriters and all concerned with commerce and navigation "to consider of the measures proper to be adopted in the present alarming state of the Navy". It looks as though the attempt failed, for the Hall Book for 10 June records the transaction of business but makes no mention of attendance by non-members.[20]

In assessing the role of the Society in the economic life of eighteenth-century Bristol, it must also be borne in mind that the Corporation from time to time played a rather more active part than it had in the seventeenth century when, generally speaking, it left economic policy in the hands of the Merchant Venturers. It is true that Merchant Venturers were still very prominent in municipal government, but they no longer dominated it in the way in which they had done earlier.[21] In relation to the foundation of a new African Company in the middle of the century and on the question of abolition of the slave trade, the Corporation acted independently and spent a good deal of its own money, although it is true that it took the same line as the Society.[22] In 1757, the Corporation, not the Hall, took the initiative in petitioning Parliament to extend the time for importing foreign corn duty free and took measures to keep down the price of corn in Bristol. The Hall followed suit only when this was reported to it by the Master.[23] The initiative in building a new Exchange for the merchants and in constructing a new Bristol Bridge to cope with the growing traffic problem of an expanding city also came from the Corporation and not from the Society, which might have been expected to press much harder for these improvements than in fact it did.[24]

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[15] See pp. 136–7.

[16] *H.B. 12*, p. 1, 16 Nov. 1789; p. 7, 23 Nov. 1789.

[17] *H.B. 12*, p. 19, 4 Jan. 1790.

[18] *H.B. 12*, p. 215, 27 June 1792.

[19] *H.B. 12*, p. 375, 30 March 1795.

[20] *H.B. 13*, p. 24, 6 June 1797; p. 25, 10 June 1797.

[21] See p. 95.

Moreover, there was on occasions some friction between the Society and the Corporation. When the Hall sought in 1758 to get a new wharfage lease for 99 years, agreement was reached with the Mayor and Surveyors of the City Lands, but the Corporation refused to confirm the agreement and required some modifications. Agreement was reached in 1759, but in 1761 the new lease had still not been made, and the Master and some of the Committee were asked to wait upon the Mayor. A new lease was not finally sealed until 7 November 1764. We do not know what lay behind all this, but it is possible that some members of the Corporation were unwilling to hand over to the Society the very valuable concession which it was seeking.[25]

Other issues about which there were some difficulties between the Society and the Corporation included the disciplining of pilots, the conservancy of the river and the availability to Bristolians of the water at the Hotwell. The Corporation asserted its right to have the last word in deciding whether pilots should be dismissed, and on at least one occasion it overrode the decision made by the Hall.[26] Responsibility for conserving the river belonged in the last resort to the Corporation, and although the Society normally carried out the work, the Corporation occasionally intervened. In 1745 it appointed its own Committee and asked the Society to contribute to the cost of cleaning the river.[27] In 1786, a deputation from the Corporation waited on the Society with reference to nuisances in the river, and the Hall agreed to examine its responsibilities under the wharfage lease. The Standing Committee met representatives of the Corporation in January 1787 and reported to the Hall that the Corporation ought to be asked to deal with the nuisances. In 1790 the Common Council ordered that the wharfage lease should be inspected, and in the next year it set up its own River Committee.[28]

[22] See p. 138; Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, pp. 89–90, 249.

[23] *H.B. 8*, 16 April 1757. [24] See pp. 225–6.

[25] See pp. 152–3. There had also been difficulties about the new wharfage lease in 1712 (Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 99).

[26] See pp. 166–7. [27] Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 254. [28] See p. 165.

There had clearly been difficulties in this matter, as there had over the Hotwell water. All freemen of Bristol were entitled to the use of Hotwell water, but when the Hall granted a new lease in 1790, its tenant made things difficult, and Common Council set up a Committee of the Whole to enquire into the rights of citizens and to confer with the Society.[29] Complaints continued to be made, and in 1793 the Corporation again asserted the privileges of Bristolians, but the question was not settled until 1795.[30]

Finally, it must be remembered that at the end of the century and in the early nineteenth century, the Society acknowledged its own inability to undertake the construction of the Floating Harbour. It played a large part in the planning, but the cost was far beyond its limited resources, and the work had eventually to be financed by a Docks Company. A number of individual Merchant Venturers were prominent in the new Company and the Society was officially represented on its Board, but the establishment of the Docks Company meant that the Society had surrendered to another body the predominant role which it had hitherto played in providing facilities for the Port of Bristol.

[29] *H.B. 12*, p. 92, 11 Dec. 1790.

[30] *H.B. 12*, p. 358, 1 Jan. 1795, Latimer, *Eighteenth Century Annals*, p. 490.

CHAPTER 15

The Changing Background in the Nineteenth Century

THE role of the Society of Merchant Venturers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was inevitably affected profoundly by local and national developments which transformed the character of the city in which the Society had for so long played a major part. Since the Society lost many of the functions which had made it so important in the economic life of Bristol in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is not necessary to give as much attention to the general background as it was when the earlier history of the Society was under consideration. Nevertheless, some brief comments must be made in order to explain why the character of the Society underwent radical change.

One major change which in itself tended to reduce the significance of the Society was the remarkable growth in the population and size of Bristol. The boundaries were extended on a number of occasions, and the population rose from about 68,000 in 1801 to 159,000 in 1851 and to 337,000 in 1901.[1] During the period when Bristol's population was undergoing unprecedented expansion, the number of Merchant Venturers tended to shrink, and in the last quarter of the century it was only about 70.[2]

The relative and absolute decline of the number of Merchant Venturers in relation to the size of the total population was significant in itself, but what was much more important was the major change in the structure of local government. Until 1835, the city had been governed by a small self-electing oligarchy many of whose members also belonged to the Society, and the two closed corporations often saw eye to eye on public matters and spoke the same language. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 changed the nature of the governing body and substituted for the old Corporation a Town Council which was answerable to an electorate and which had to some extent to take into account public opinion. The Merchant Venturers, although claiming to be a "public body", remained a closed corporation, and the old relatively cosy relationship between the Society and the Corporation was no longer possible. In due course, the Docks Company, in the management of which the

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[1] See table in B. Little, *City and County of Bristol*, 1954, p. 330.

[2] See p. 255.

Society had so large a share, came to an end, and the docks were taken over by the Town Council (1848);[3] the wharfage lease was terminated in 1861,[4] and in the same year Merchant Venturers were deprived by the Council of their control over the Bristol Channel Pilots.[5]

The fact that the Town Council after 1835 was an elected body did not, of course, mean that individual members of the Society no longer had any influence in shaping the policy of the city. The Town Council remained overwhelmingly Tory throughout the period, and this tended to favour Merchant Venturers. Although the office of mayor was held on only eleven occasions between 1835 and 1898 by a man who had or who was to hold high office in the Society, some 22 out of the 90 men chosen as Aldermen were Merchant Venturers; and of the 404 men who were Mayors, Aldermen or Councillors in the same period, approximately one in seven belonged to the Society. It must be remembered, however, that the proportion of Merchant Venturers in the Town Council was smaller than it had been in earlier centuries, and the fact that a man was elected to the Council did not mean that he was there as a representative of the Society. The Town Council on a number of occasions pursued policies detrimental to the Society's interests, and members of the Society do not seem to have acted as an organised pressure group within the Council.[6]

The growth of the powers of the central government and the increasing interest of Parliament in local affairs also presented a threat to the privileged position of the Society, which was continually forced to fight against what it regarded as unwarranted interference from outside. The reform of Parliament in 1832 and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 ushered in what must have seemed to the Society to be an Age of Interference, but even before then, the central government was showing concern for matters which the Society considered to be its own business. The widespread misuse of charitable funds in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries increasingly attracted the attention of reformers and led to government intervention. Thus, in 1821 the Clerk was required to make a list of the charities for which the Society was responsible for the information of the Commissioners enquiring into Charities.[7] He informed the Commissioners that he did not think Colston's Hospital came under their terms of reference, and with some hesitation they accepted this view and limited themselves to enquiring into the Merchants' Hall School, the Merchants' Almhouse, Colston's Almshouse, the Vick Charity for building a bridge over the Avon and Mrs. Eleanor Hammond's charity.[8] For the most part, the Commissioners had only minor criticisms to make, but with regard to the Vick Charity they argued that the Society ought to have raised the interest rate from 3 per cent to 4 per cent in 1782 when it started to pay that rate on its own bonds. The Society maintained that 3 per cent was satisfactory, but when the Commissioners threatened to refer the matter to the Attorney-General, the Society, "having attentively considered the Circumstance", decided to give way.[9]

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[3] See p. 308. [4] See p. 313. [5] See pp. 317–8.

[6] The figures given in this paragraph are based on a comparison between the lists of Town Councillors given in A. B. Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, and the list of members of the Society (see appendix A, pp. 547–65). It is interesting to note that of the 151 J.P.s appointed between 1836 and 1898, only 24 were Merchant Venturers.

[7] *H.B. 15*, p. 134, 6 Feb. 1821.

In 1833, the Society received a government form requiring it to make a return of all duties on shipping collected in the port, other than by Act of Parliament, for the years 1830, 1831 and 1832. It replied that all the duties which it collected were by authority of Act of Parliament, and with dignified disapproval it informed the Collector and Comptroller of Customs that "the Society could not consent to furnish the Accounts required inasmuch as it would be an Admission of an Authority to which, without meaning the slightest disrespect, or having any wish whatever for concealment, they felt themselves upon Principle bound to demur".[10]

It was not quite so easy to sidestep the enquiries of the Commissioners who were examining municipal corporations. In 1833, they expressed a desire to learn something of the nature and constitution of the Merchant Venturers. The Clerk argued that although in origin the Society might be considered of a municipal character, such a character was now lost and had not been exercised for over a century. The Master, Wardens, Treasurer and Clerk were to wait on the Commissioners with the charters, but if any more information was required, a formal request must be made to the Hall.[11] The Commissioners pressed for detailed information about the wharfage receipts and other matters, and the Society's officers replied that they must refer this to the Hall.[12] The eleven members present at a General Hall on 4 December 1833 took the line that although they did not think the Society came within the terms of reference of the Commissioners, they could not refuse information about the nature and constitution of the Society with propriety or, indeed, without some imputation on their loyalty ,"a quality for which this Society has at all time been distinguished". Enquiries, however, about the affairs and property of the Society were altogether different, and they decided that "any disclosure of their Affairs . . . and any Act which might be construed into an admission of the Right to make such Investigation would in the Opinion of this Society be a dereliction of their Corporate Duty, if not an infringement of their Oath of Office. Upon Principle, therefore, and in support of the Society's Rights which they are bound to uphold they are of opinion that the application of the Commissioners cannot be complied with."[13]

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[8] Mrs. Eleanor Hammond had left £600 for charitable purposes in St. James's parish. The Society was bound to pay the parish 3 per cent on the money.

[9] *H.B. 15*, pp. 223 ff., 3 April 1822; p. 248, 7 Aug. 1822.

[10] *H.B. 17*, pp. 150 ff., 6 March 1833.

[11] *H.B. 17*, pp. 177, 5 Nov. 1833.

[12] *H.B. 17*, pp. 190, 4 Dec. 1833.

It was not surprising that in their Report in 1835 the Commissioners had a number of implicit and explicit criticisms to make about the Society.[14] They took the view that according to the Charters, every freeman of Bristol apprenticed to a merchant or exercising that profession for seven years had a right to claim admission to the Society, which was merely one of those gilds to which all citizens probably belonged at one time, and they considered that the Merchant Venturers ought to be no more than "a limb" of the civic corporation. The Commissioners were obviously very much concerned with the high port charges in Bristol and with the fact that the Society held from the Corporation the very profitable wharfage lease and other concessions. They were irritated by the fact that "an account of the income and expenditure of the Society was refused to us", but fortunately for the Merchant Venturers, the Commissioners were unable to press home their attack in view of "the doubt which may exist how far, in the present form of the Society, it is to be considered a municipal corporation".[15]

Although it emerged more or less unscathed from this threat by a reforming Whig government, the Society had in effect been given notice that there was a new spirit abroad and that privileged private corporations could no longer expect to be left undisturbed. If the Society managed to survive the attentions of the Commissioners, the self-electing Corporation of Bristol did not, and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 replaced it by a new Town Council responsible to the electors.

More serious trouble lay ahead as a result of the activities of the central government. In 1836, the Commissioners for enquiring into Charities requested the Master to attend them concerning Colston's Hospital, and as a result of their probing, the Society found itself in 1839 indicted by the Attorney-General on the ground that it was wrongfully claiming to hold in its own right certain lands which belonged to Colston's Charity. In the eighteen-forties, judgement was given against the Merchant Venturers, and the decision was upheld when the Society appealed.[16]

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[13] *H.B. 17*, pp. 192–4, 4 Dec. 1833. The Society informed the Bristol M.P.s about the proceedings and asked them to look after the Society's interests if there was legislation (*H.B. 17*, p. 197, 10 Jan. 1834).

[14] *Report of the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations: Bristol*, 1835, pp. 54 ff. for section on the Society. See also the sections on the Bristol Dock Company, pp. 58 ff.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Another big blow to the Society as a result of action by the central government and by Parliament was the taking from it of the Seamen's Hospital Fund. The Society had administered the Bristol fund by virtue of a special clause in an Act of 1747, but the matter of providing for disabled seamen was a national question, and the peculiar position existing in Bristol was bound to come under examination when reforming governments began to look into it after 1830. The Society fought a long drawn-out battle to preserve its rights, but eventually in 1851 it lost control of the fund as a result of legislation.[17]

The Society's control over pilotage in the Bristol Channel was also called into question by the government which was not content to leave it in the hands of a private corporation, and in 1861 the Town Council took pilotage away from the Merchant Venturers and handed it over to its own Docks Committee.[18]

Even when it had surrendered most of its former rights concerning the port of Bristol, the Society did not remain immune from government interference. The educational and charitable work with which it was increasingly concerned in the second half of the century meant that it was very much under the supervision of the Commissioners for Endowed Charities and that it was affected by the educational policies of the government. It had a long and fierce battle with the Endowed Schools Commissioners set up under the Endowed Schools Act of 1869, and the result was a radical change in the Society's relations with Colston's Hospital.[19]

Developments in the organisation and scope of national and local government in the nineteenth century thus produced great changes in the work of the Society of Merchant Venturers, but they are not the only reason why the Society came to play a less important part in the economic life of Bristol than it had in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The economy of Bristol was itself undergoing considerable transformation. There has as yet been no detailed study of Bristol's foreign trade in the nineteenth century. In general, it continued to grow, although its expansion was much less rapid than that of its rivals, particularly in the first half of the century. The relative importance of overseas trade in the economy of Bristol appears to have declined and that of manufacturing and service industries to have increased, so that merchants engaged in foreign trade no longer played such a predominant role as in earlier times. The purely economic significance of an organisation concerned with foreign trade was bound to decrease as the balance of wealth shifted within the community.

[16] See pp. 365–70. [17] See pp. 394–8. [18] See pp. 317–18. [19] See pp. 372–4.

If the Society of Merchant Venturers had been really determined to remain a powerful economic pressure group, it would have taken steps to recruit as many as possible among the merchant community. In fact, only a small minority even of its own members played a very active part in its affairs, and on numerous occasions the decisions made by the Society represented the views of the handful of members who attended the meeting. Occasionally, attempts were made to admit men of substance from outside,[20] but on the whole the Society preferred to remain a small, exclusive group which declined in numbers and did not include all the leading merchants of the city. It could not speak with authority for the whole merchant community. Even in the first half of the century, it seems to have been more concerned with defending its privileges and developing its property than with making much effort to give a lead in the business life of the city, and it was left to the Chamber of Commerce and other organisations to try to fill the vacuum left by the Society.[21]

The abandonment by the Society of its role as champion of the mercantile interests of Bristol was a gradual process spread over the first half of the nineteenth century, but it was already very noticeable in the first quarter of the period. The loss by the Society of some of its special rights and privileges can be more precisely dated. It surrendered the lease of cranage in 1837; it ceased to be directly involved in the docks when the Dock Company came to an end in 1848; the Seamen's Hospital Fund was taken from it in 1851; and in 1861 it surrendered the wharfage lease and also lost control of pilotage.

As a result of all this, the Society in the second half of the century was a very different institution from what it had been earlier, Henceforth, its prime concerns were development of its property, the use of a considerable part of its income for the furtherance of charitable and educational purposes, and the management of miscellaneous charitable trusts for which it had assumed responsibility. It adapted itself to a new age and ceased to be much concerned with the economic purposes for which it had originally been established.

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[20] See pp. 251–2.

[21] See pp. 294–306.

CHAPTER 16

Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Nineteenth Century

In the course of the nineteenth century, 222 men were admitted to the Society by patrimony, apprenticeship or on payment of a fine, as compared with 366 admitted between 1701 and 1799.[1] 64 of these came in by patrimony as the sons of members, 50 by apprenticeship and 109 on payment of a fine. Entry by apprenticeship did not mean that the Society recruited a considerable number of outsiders by this means, since 27 of the apprentices had served under their fathers who were already members, 8 with uncles and 3 with brothers. New blood was introduced mainly by admitting redemptioners who agreed to pay an entry fine. Of the 109 new members recruited in this way, nearly half were admitted in the years 1803, 1838 and 1852 when the Society decided to strengthen its ranks by large-scale admissions.[2] Thus, the Society maintained a more or less even balance between existing Merchant Venturer families and outsiders. Honorary membership was granted much more sparingly than in the eighteenth century, and only 20 members were admitted in this way, as compared with 58 in the earlier period. No honorary members were added to the list between 1864 and 1900. Now that the Society was less involved in economic affairs, it may not have thought it so necessary to win friends in high places.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hall decided to investigate the practice concerning the admission of apprentices.[3] This investigation may have been related to what the Treasurer, William Claxton, called "a peculiar scene" at a Hall meeting on 5 November 1849. This took the form of an attack by a member on the Treasurer based on what the member had heard "out of doors" about the Treasurer taking an apprentice from Colston's Hospital and exacting a premium of £300 so that the young man might qualify for membership. Claxton said that his attacker alleged that the Treasurer took the boy to the Council House to register his indentures "in your livery", that is, the dress of the boys of Colston's Hospital. He did not deny the facts, but he noted that he was very angry and not a bit ashamed and that he forgave his attacker.[4]

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[1] See p. 102.

[2] In 1803, 19 members were admitted at a reduced fine of £150; in 1838, another 19 members were admitted at £50; and in 1852, 13 were admitted at the same rate but not all at the same time.

[3] *H.B.21*, p. 72, 2 Aug. 1850.

The result of the investigation into apprenticeship was that Mr. Brice and the Clerk reported that the regulations of 1618 had remained unchanged until 1765 when an additional regulation laid down that no one should be enrolled as an apprentice or admitted to the Society unless he had paid an apprenticeship premium of £300 or was a relation of the member to whom he was bound. The report noted that the rule had not been universally observed.[5]

The whole question of admissions was then examined and new regulations were finally agreed in 1851.[6] As far as apprentices were concerned, the new rules laid down that they were to serve at least 7 years and that they were to be under 21 when apprenticed. No one was to be admitted by apprenticeship unless he was a relative of the member to whom he was apprenticed in a degree not more distant than first cousin or unless he paid £25 to the Treasurer. Trouble arose in 1860 over the case of Sholto Vere Hare who was admitted on 28 February as apprentice of Thomas Poole King, a member to whom he had been bound on 26 November 1852. He had paid £25 to the Treasurer, but as he was about 40 years of age and had been head of a firm of manufacturers during the time he was supposed to be apprenticed to a merchant, there was no doubt some criticism. Latimer states that there was nothing in the ordinances to invalidate his claim, but the fact that he was over 21 at the time when he was apprenticed would appear to make him ineligible.[7] The Hall decided that the regulations were open to abuse and eventually ordered that no one should be admitted unless he had been bound before the age of 18 and produced a written certificate that he had not been occupied in any vocation or business other than on his master's behalf during the time of his apprenticeship.[8] A strict line seems to have been followed thereafter. In 1861, the Clerk refused to certify that the apprenticeship regulations had been observed in the case of the son of a member, Samuel Vowles

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[4] *Claxton's Journal 1*, p. 141, 5 Nov. 1849.

[5] *H.B.21*, pp. 84, 92 ff., 31 Oct. 1850. The rule certainly was enforced on occasions. In 1836, for example, Mr. Harman Visger's indentures were examined and it was decided that he was not eligible for membership as he had not paid a premium of at least £300 (*H.B.17*, p. 311, 26 May 1836). There are references from time to time in the *Hall Books* to the premium being paid, including one on 2 November 1850 when Edwin Green Chamberlain, son of a close friend of Claxton, was apprenticed to him, "it appearing that a fee of £300 was paid in such apprenticeship" (*H.B.21*, p. 88, 2 Nov. 1850).

[6] *H.B.21*, p. 138, 25 April 1851.

[7] *H.B.22*, p. 429, 24 Feb. 1860; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 270.

[8] *H.B.23*, p. 17, 11 May 1860; p. 19, 8 June 1860; p. 41, 31 July 1860.

Gwyer, and the Standing Committee refused to allow Gwyer to give notice of a motion for the repeal of the laws in this particular case. When John Hopton Wyld moved in 1866 that the rules be waived in favour of his son, this was not accepted.[9]

In the first half of the century, the Society was concerned about the shrinkage in numbers and endeavoured on occasions to recruit new members by tempting them with the offer of an entry fine lower than the £200 fixed on 3 September 1768.[10] Thus, in 1803, at a meeting at which only 9 members were present, it was resolved to admit not less than 15 and not more than 20 redemptioners at a fine of £150. They were to be "mercantile men", and the 1768 ordinance was to be restored as soon as they had been elected.[11] Further recruitment was discussed in 1836 when a committee was appointed "to consider the best means to be adopted in order to propose admission as members of this society to some of the principal Merchants and Manufacturers in this City . . .".[12] Nothing was done until 1838 when the Standing Committee recommended that the order of 3 September 1768 should again be temporarily suspended to permit the admission of not more than 20 redemptioners at a fine of £50.[13] The earlier suggestion that the new men should include manufacturers was not taken up. Anyone so elected must be free of the city and must be "a Mercantile Man".[14] At a meeting of the Hall on 2 August 1838, at which 20 members were present, 31 names were put forward. They were voted on in the order of names drawn from a hat, and the 20 with the most votes were declared elected. The fine of £200 was then restored.[15]

In the late eighteen-forties there was a conflict among the members about policy concerning admissions. Some of the Merchant Venturers wanted to increase membership, and this led to an unpleasant scene at the elections on 10 November 1849. William Claxton's *Journal* records how when the Master, Henry Bush, was about to proceed to the election of a new committee, 6 gentlemen left the

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[9] *H.B.23*, p. 101, 16 Feb. 1861; p. 116, 13 March 1861; *H.B.24*, pp. 79, 80, 21 April 1866.

[10] See p. 103.

[11] *H.B.13*, p. 261, 12 Sept. 1803. Nineteen new members were elected on 17 Sept. 1803 at a meeting at which only eight members were present, all of them members of the Standing Committee (*H.B.13*, p. 264, 17 Sept. 1803).

[12] *H.B.17*, p. 437, 12 Oct. 1836. On 26 October 1836, the committee's powers were revoked, and the matter was referred to the Standing Committee, as this was thought to be more in accord with the Charter of Charles I vesting powers in the Master, Wardens and Assistants. They might, however, obtain assistance from the members of the original committee (*H.B.17*, p. 442, 26 Oct. 1836).

[13] *H.B.18*, p. 169, 27 March 1838.

[14] *H.B.18*, p. 213, 28 July 1838; p. 218, 3 Aug. 1838.

[15] *H.B.18*, p. 227, 24 Aug. 1838. One of those so elected, John Vining, was not in fact eligible, since he was not free of the City (*H.B.18*, p. 248, 12 Oct. 1738).

Hall and the Master-elect refused to take the chair. Claxton commented with obvious irritation that "the Treasurer was obliged to run in every direction for members to come and make a Committee". Five came at great personal inconvenience. He said that the reason for the trouble was not disrespect to the Master but "a Motion that the Society ought to increase its Members". When those who wanted an increase in membership were unable to carry it in the manner they wished, they created a difficulty. Claxton lamented that an excellent Master was deserted at the last, and added "I fear there must be some political feeling about it." This is possible for Henry Bush was a leader of the Tories.[16]

The battle continued. In the new regulations for admission approved on 25 April 1851, the fine for admission was permanently reduced to £50 and nothing was specifically said about candidates having to be "mercantile men".[17] This certainly made more business men eligible for admission, but on the other hand the 22 members present carried a motion that it was inexpedient to adopt the Standing Committee's proposal of 21 December 1850 that up to 18 new members should be admitted. The conservative Treasurer, William Claxton, recorded with pleasure that the motion was passed unanimously "and the Free Traders floored who wished to swamp the place".[18] In 1852, however, 13 members were admitted on payment of a £50 fine.

The more liberal rules for admission adopted in 1851 were a tacit admission by the Hall that the Society was much less concerned with matters of trade than it had once been and that it might be desirable to admit men who were not primarily concerned with overseas commerce. George Rogers, admitted in 1854, was stated to be an alkali manufacturer,[19] and Thomas Terrett Taylor, although shown in the Hall Book as a merchant, appears on the printed notice of the meeting as a goldsmith.[20] Nevertheless, it was not common for non-merchants to be admitted as redemptioners. In 1873, the Standing Committee examined the practice since 1851. Of the existing members, 24 had come in by birth, 24 by apprenticeship and 30 by redemption. The Committee reported that it had no reason to believe that those admitted by fine had been professional men or other than "men of purely mercantile business". It stated that it had always been the practice to choose as redemptioners "only persons belonging to the mercantile community", and it thought there was no need to alter the practice.[21]

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[16] *Claxton's Journal 1*, pp. 144 ff., 10 Nov. 1849.

[17] *H.B.21*, p. 138, 25 April 1851.

[18] *H.B.21*, 25 April 1851; *Claxton's Journal 1*, p. 158, 25 April 1851.

[19] *H.B.21*, p. 379, 12 April 1854.

[20] *H.B.23*, p. 368, 6 June 1864.

[21] *H.B.25*, pp. 171, 172, 27 July 1872; pp. 199 ff., 17 Jan. 1873.

Later regulations laid down that no redemptioner should be admitted unless notice had been given at a previous Hall of his proposed election,[22] and that he must have the support of three-quarters of those present at the time of his election.[23]

In 1885, there was some talk about petitioning the Queen for an alteration in the Charter, and in July the Clerk reported that when he was in London, he had called at the Privy Council Office and was given to understand that a petition would receive the royal assent. It was decided that the Master should call a special meeting of the Committee to consider the matter, but no further action was taken. Possibly, the intention was to remove the clause in the Charter which requires Merchant Venturers to be freemen of the city.[24]

Although for a considerable time after the new admission regulations of 1851 the Hall limited its choice of redemptioners to men directly concerned with "purely mercantile business", the new bye-laws had in fact left it free to choose otherwise if it wished to do so, and it came in time to give a wide interpretation to the word "merchant". In the later nineteenth century some of the redemptioners were recorded as being "gentlemen" and one of them was a soldier.[25]

The fact that those claiming membership by patrimony did not have to be practising merchants themselves meant that at any time during the period men of other occupations might become Merchant Venturers. William Claxton's son Donald, who entered by patrimony in 1863, had been intended by his father to become a clerk in the Society's office, but in 1865 he took Holy Orders and delighted his parents' heart on Charter Day on 10 November 1869 by delivering to the Society what many gentlemen assured his father was "one of the best discourses for the occasion they ever heard".[26] On the other hand, the Society was not prepared to admit by patrimony those who were already in Holy Orders. In 1822, when the Reverend Robert Henry Fowler applied for admission as the son of a member, the Clerk was instructed to examine the precedents. He reported, rather inconveniently, that although admission by purchase seemed to have been confined to "mere merchants", there was no restriction on those who claimed admission by birth and that it had long been the practice to admit sons of members even though they were not themselves merchants. The Committee got round the difficulty by pointing out that the original constitution of the Society was purely mercantile, and, "having considered also that Clergymen are prohibited from trading under Penalties", it decided that it would not be consistent with the constitution and design of the original incorporation to admit clergymen.[27]

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[22] *H.B.25*, p. 228, 5 April 1873.

[23] *H.B.25*, p. 269, 22 Aug. 1873; p. 272, 30 Aug. 1873.

[24] *H.B.27*, p. 127, 17 July 1885; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 269. The matter came up again in 1895, but no action was taken.

[25] See, for example, *H.B.27*, p. 153, 30 Jan. 1886, Gilbert Leigh Abbot; *ibid.*, p. 264, 27 Oct. 1888, George Oswald Spafford; *ibid.*, p. 299, 27 July 1889, Edward Burnet James; *ibid.*, p. 348, 26 July 1890, William Welsford Ward, all described as "Gentlemen"; *H.B.28*, p. 306, 28 Jan. 1899, Colonel Frederic Cusac Ord.

[26] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 32. On 10 November 1866 when the Rector of St. Stephen's was unwell, Donald Claxton, then curate of St. Mary Redcliffe, took his place and intoned the prayers. His father commented in his journal: "Oh my poor heart and his Mother's. It was a proud day for us to see our son doing the duty in the presence of his Diocesan . . .". *Ibid.*, p. 41.

After 1851, it would have been much more difficult to exclude sons of members who were entitled to the freedom by patrimony from demanding the right to take up the freedom, but there does not seem to have been any case of a non-merchant insisting on his right. If he had done so, the Hall might have found it difficult to refuse his request. Presumably, a convention developed by which Merchant Venturers did not put forward all of their sons who were technically eligible and no one tried to insist on his right to join if it was obvious that the Hall did not want him.

The general impression one gets about membership of the Society in the nineteenth century is that even when the Society ceased to be a body concerned with economic issues, it remained overwhelmingly an association of men who could be described in some sense as "merchants". Industrialists and professional men did not form any significant part of the membership. Entry by patrimony and by apprenticeship ensured that there was a strong "family" element in the Society, and entry by redemption was available only to those of whom the Society approved. They were normally men of substance who held Tory principles and who were attached to the Constitution and to the Church of England. They were not in sympathy with the strong Liberal movement in nineteenth-century Bristol which returned many Liberal M.P.s to Westminster, even though it was unable to make much impact on the Conservative majority on the Corporation.

The political views of the Conservative Merchant Venturers are reflected in the *Journal* of the Treasurer William Claxton. He commented on the election in April 1868 that it was an attempt "to save our old City from the disgrace of going on for ever with two Liberals". The Conservative candidate, John William Miles, and the two men who proposed him, Councillor R. J. Poole King and Alderman Sholto Vere Hare, were all Merchant Venturers. John William Miles scraped home by 5,173 votes against the Liberal, Samuel Morley, who received 4,977. Claxton noted with delight that at the Society's Audit Dinner on 28 May, the election of a Conservative gave occasion to the Master to have it "Blue and all

[27] *H.B.15*, p. 214, 5 Feb. 1822; p. 228, 17 April 1822.

Blue" with not a single Radical present and all the toasts being of a Conservative political tendency. The triumph was short-lived. Mr. Morley alleged that his defeat was the result of "an undue use of money, beer, and intimidation" and at the House of Commons' investigation, evidence was produced of the Conservative committee hiring strong-arm men, using bribery and paying non-voters to impersonate voters. The election was declared void. Poor Claxton commented sadly on "this shameful and unprecedently vile transaction of the Liberal Party". No doubt he found some consolation on 10 October 1868 when the Master asked all the Standing Committee to dine at Roger's Hotel, Weston-super-Mare, where the guests were all the Conservative candidates for East Somerset. His hopes rose again at the General Election in November 1868 when Philip William Skynner Miles, another Merchant Venturer and brother of the unseated member, stood in the Conservative interest. Claxton was the first to vote in Clifton. The result of the election was a disaster from his point of view, and he wrote "alas, it was not to be. The Conservatives are beaten by more than 2000 votes by the most violent intimidation from Roman Catholics and Seamen, mobs of organised gangs of ruffians – mostly Irish." He added "It is almost and indeed altogether a religious question and especially as to the Continuance of Church and State."[28]

The number of members on the Society's register fluctuated in the course of the century, but the overall picture was a decrease. The Society became smaller and more select during a century in which the population of Bristol underwent unprecedented expansion. On 10 November 1799, there were 88 members (excluding 12 honorary freemen).[29] Largely as a result of the admission of 19 redemptioners in 1803, the number had risen to 99 by November 1810.[30] Ten years later, there were 100 members,[31] but the total had fallen to 89 by 10 November 1830[32] and to 68 by 3 August 1838.[33] The admission of 19 redemptioners in 1838 helped restore the position,[34] but there was a decline during the eighteen-forties when the total number of admissions for the whole decade was only 11. There was extensive recruitment in the eighteen-fifties, including the admission of 13 members by fine in 1852. On 3 April 1860 the number stood at 81 ordinary and 5 honorary members.[35] In the last quarter of the century, it fluctuated between 70 and 75.

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[28] *Claxton's Journal II*, pp. 71–3, 79, 84; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, 439–40, 442. There was considerable violence at the election in November, and both parties alleged that the other was responsible.

[29] *H.B.13*, p. 116

[30] *H.B.14*, p. 136 (excluding 11 honorary members).

[31] *H.B.15*, p. 118 (excluding 11 honorary members).

[32] *H.B.16*, p. 437 (excluding 9 honorary members).

[33] *H.B.18*, p. 218 (excluding honorary members).

[34] *H.B.18*, p. 227, 24 Aug. 1838.

[35] *H.B.23*, p. 1.

The number of members who took an active part was very much smaller than the total on the register. Once a man had been admitted, he remained a Merchant Venturer for the rest of his life, even though he lost interest or ceased to live near Bristol. One member resigned in 1830, presumably because of old age and poverty, and he was then given a place in Colston's Almshouse and £10 to furnish his room,[36] but when Mr. Warden Hellicar announced in 1852 that he intended to go permanently to Australia to spend the rest of his days there, the Hall did not ask him to resign and proposed giving him a piece of plate.[37] In 1861, John E. Lunell sent in a letter of resignation on the grounds that the decision to remove Colston's Hospital to Gloucestershire made his membership not only painful but unbearable. The matter was referred to the Clerk who solemnly reported that "A life Membership in your Corporation being in the nature of a freehold interest to which mutual privileges and responsibilities are attached cannot be abrogated by the mere voluntary resignation of the Member himself as distinguished from any Act of the Society." He maintained that resignation required a deed under hand and seal accepted by a duly convened meeting.[38]

The Society did not always receive information about the death of members, so that the nominal roll at times was inaccurate. In 1837, for example, the Clerk noted that Christopher Thornton and Thomas Rowse must have been dead for some years past, "the former it appears was elected in the year 1752 and the latter in the year 1764". In future, their names were to be omitted.[39] In 1839, it was noted that Edward Perkins should be omitted, "it having been ascertained that he died in Batavia about two years ago".[40]

Attendance at meetings, even on Charter Day when the Master and other officers were elected, was often remarkably low. On 10 November 1810, for example, only 15 members out of 99 were present,[41] and on 10 November 1820, only 23 out of a possible total of 100.[42] At General Halls on 16 April and 1 October 1830, the attendance figures were 9 and 7, and with one exception they all belonged to the Standing Committee.[43] Only 20 members were present on 24 August 1838 to elect 20 redemptioners,[44] and on 10 November 1838, the recently elected members outnumbered the established Merchant Venturers by 14 to 11.[45] For many meetings in the eighteen-forties, attendance was between 10 and 20, and on a

[36] *H.B.16*, p. 393, 11 June 1830.

[37] *H.B.21*, p. 228, 14 May 1852; p. 230, 11 May 1852; p. 231, 15 May 1852. He had been a member for 25 years.

[38] *H.B.23*, pp. 128–9, 25 April 1861; pp. 142 ff., 9 Aug. 1861.

[39] *H.B.18*, p. 126, 3 Nov. 1837.

[40] *H.B.18*, p. 388, 8 Nov. 1839.

[41] *H.B.14*, p. 136.

[42] *H.B.15*, p. 118.

[43] *H.B.16*, pp. 384, 413.

[44] *H.B.18*, p. 227

[45] *H.B.18*, p. 270.

number of occasions it was impossible to transact business because there was not a quorum.[46] In the second half of the century, there was some improvement, and meetings between 20 and 30 seem to have been normal, although on occasions attendance fell below 20.

It seems clear that for a considerable number of members the Society's business did not offer any great attraction. In his *Journal*, William Claxton made acid comments on such people. He recorded on 1 May 1868 that Mr. Robert Rainey, "a useless member", had died,[47] and he remarked in 1869 that Mr. Peter Maze had died at his residence in London where he had been living ever since his Mastership in 1837. Claxton said he "had never taken any interest in the Society's affairs – so to speak he is not missed".[48] Of Henry Bright who died in the same year near Malvern, Claxton noted that although he had been a member for 57 years, "he never took any interest in the affairs of the Society and was not on any committee".[49] There was, however, an excuse for Henry George Fowler who died in 1869 and who had been a member since 1813. Claxton recorded that "It is some years since he took any part in the Society's affairs and was in fact pronounced Lunatic in 1844 and was in a Lunatic asylum when he died, R.I.P."[50] The Hall had earlier asked the Charity Commissioners to remove Mr. Fowler's name from the list of Colston Trustees as well as that of Valentine Hellicar who was in Australia.[51]

Old age, illness and residence away from Bristol depleted the numbers of active members. In addition, there were probably some people who joined only for reasons of prestige and who were not particularly anxious to become deeply involved in what must often have seemed time-consuming and unprofitable business. The result was that a great deal of work fell on the shoulders of a relatively small committed group which was prepared to do a fairly long stint as officers and as members of the Standing Committee. The employment of a paid Treasurer from 1841 and the gradual increase in the office staff may also have inclined some members to think that a great deal of work could be left in the hands of salaried officials. William Claxton was at times very bitter about what was expected of him. When his salary was increased by £150 a year in 1850, he remarked that four times the work had been done by him than by any previous Treasurer and that quite four times would now be put upon him. He was required in future to collect the Charity Rents, and more than half his additional salary would have to go in employing a clerk. He added that he had a wife and 5 children absolutely dependent on him, "else would I throw the paltry gifts in their faces". He commented savagely "One Man of Wealth which is, so to speak, untold, endeavoured to shew that this additional work ought to be done without addition to my previous Salary! ! ! " He piously added that he regretted that he had been told about this and asked the Lord to put it out of his mind.[52] He remarked of the Master, George Pope, in 1854 that he had grossly insulted him and had put into his hands after the death of Mr. Osborne double the work at no increased salary. Indeed, he had endeavoured to lower it. Again, Claxton remarked characteristically "I forgive it all. May I also be forgiven."[53]

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[46] For example, *H.B.18*, p. 312, 15 March 1839; *H.B.20*, p. 32, 3 Oct. 1844; p. 34, 3 Oct. 1844; p. 306, 10 May 1847; p. 307, 14 May 1847; *H.B.21*, p. 142, 10 May 1851.

[47] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 72.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

During the nineteenth century, the Society brought up-to-date its Standing Orders[54] and also re-examined the method of electing officers. This led to some fierce controversy in the 1850s. A Committee was set up on 27 February 1852[55] which reported in November 1854.[56] There was to be no change in the method of electing the Master and Wardens, but a new procedure was to be adopted with regard to the Assistants. It seems that the practice had grown up by which the outgoing Master was automatically chosen First Assistant and that 4 Assistants nominated by him were also elected. The remaining 5 were elected by ballot out of 10 members nominated by the outgoing Master. The Committee reported that this had been done for a great many years, but that it was unable to find when the practice first originated. It was not in accordance with the Charter of 1639 which stated that the Assistants should be elected "according to the same order" as the Master and Wardens. The Committee thought it desirable that the outgoing Master should continue to be the First Assistant and that he should name 4 Assistants for election, but that the remaining 5 should be chosen by the whole body of those present. This proposal was not confirmed by the Hall. What eventually emerged on 28 August 1855 was a number of bye-laws which made the constitution less oligarchical than it had been hitherto. As far as the election of Master was concerned, the returning Master was to nominate one person who had already served as Master, Warden or Assistant; the Wardens and Assistants were to name another, and the Commonalty a third. One of these was to be elected Master by a majority vote. The Senior and Junior Wardens were to be elected in the same manner. With regard to the Assistants, the name of the outgoing Master, if present, was to be

[52] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 152, 2 Nov. 1850.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 186, 10 Nov. 1854.

[54] *H.B.18*, p. 295, 18 Jan. 1839; pp. 296–7, 6 Feb. 1839.

[55] *H.B.21*, p. 217, 27 Feb. 1852.

[56] *H.B.21*, pp. 423 ff., 6 Nov. 1854.

put to the vote. If elected, he became First Assistant. Every member present was then to deliver to the Clerk a list with 4 names (or 5 if the outgoing Master had not been elected Assistant) from the Wardens and Assistants then present. Then there was to be a vote to choose 4 (or 5) Assistants. Next, every member was to hand in a list of 5 persons to make up the remaining Assistants, and there was again to be a vote. All persons in the election were to be present.

There was at this time a great deal of controversy in the Society. At the time of the elections on 10 November 1854, the Committee concerned with new election procedure had reported a few days earlier, but no action had yet been taken. According to Claxton, the Master, George Pope, tried to change the procedure, but, as Claxton put it, "he and his clique were beaten".[57] Claxton thought that he had been grossly insulted by Pope, whom he considered petulant, overbearing, disrespectful and fatiguing in all his ways and as not possessing the mind or heart of a Gentleman.[58] When the new bye-laws were carried by one vote after a long contest in August 1855, Claxton commented "I fear it will be the opening of Discords Where all has been before as one family."[59]

His fears were justified. There was a stormy election in November 1855 when "much that was extremely unpleasant occurred." The factions retired to separate rooms and there was a contested election. James Hassell, who was the nominee of the establishment, was opposed by Thomas Porter Jose, the nominee of the Commonalty. Hassell was elected by 15 to 11, and was, as Claxton put it, in the undignified position of being elected by a majority instead of, as heretofore, unanimously. Hassell asked to have Robert Gay Barrow as Senior Warden, but the Commonalty opposed this, and Mr. Jose was elected by a majority of 4. Claxton says that there was a rumour that he himself had used his exertions on 10 November to prevent the return of some gentlemen and to promote others. He remarks laconically "I got up, emphatically denied it – requested to know my accusers – all silent – ends in smoke."[60]

At the elections in 1856, "much personal feeling was evinced", but by the next year Claxton was able to say that the election was rather more peaceful than in the past two years.[61] Evidently things settled down after this mid-nineteenth century upheaval, and although there may have been other examples of in-fighting in the Society, there was no Claxton to record them in a confidential Journal.

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[57] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 184, 10 Nov. 1854.

[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 186.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 190, 28 Aug. 1855.

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 191–4, 10 Nov. 1855, 14 Dec. 1855.

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 200, 207.

Two procedural points may be briefly noted. In 1807 the Master received a letter from Mr. Bright, Mr. Protheroe and 15 other members asking him to call a special Hall to consider the legality of the proceedings of a meeting held on 1 April last. The Master reported that as he was about to go to London on urgent business, he was unable to do so. They had also asked that their protest against the proceedings should be entered in the Journal. The Master asked the Clerk to look for precedents, and as none could be found, he refused to enter the protest in the record.[62]

The other case concerned the Master's casting vote. On 9 March 1836, there was an election for the Receiver of Wharfage. There were 3 applicants, and the voting was 7, 7 and 4. There was a discussion on whether the Master had a casting vote, some members left during the discussion and the matter was adjourned. The Clerk was instructed to search the records. He reported that he could not find any reference to the Master having a second vote and that he did not think a casting vote consistent with the Charter, since the powers given there were to be exercised by a majority of the members.[63]

The administrative organisation of the Society developed in a number of ways in the course of the century to meet new needs but by far the most important change concerned the office of Treasurer. Until 1841, the office was unpaid, although there were occasional presents to those who held it. In May 1801, Samuel Whitchurch was appointed after the death of James Daltera, who had been Treasurer for 27 years.[64] When he died on 23 February 1816, Joseph Hellicar was appointed in his place.[65] Hellicar apparently ran into business difficulties in 1819 when he considered himself to be "in a very delicate situation" and offered to resign, but the Hall unanimously expressed its confidence in him and asked him to continue.[66] After 26 years service, when his sight was failing, he sent in a letter of resignation.[67] The Standing Committee then recommended that in future the Treasurer should be a salaried officer, "he providing and paying all Clerks whom he may require." He was to be between the age of 30 and 50, was to find two sureties of £3,000 each, and if he was a member of the Society, he was not to have a vote.[68] This proposal was accepted in principle on 23 November, and William

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[62] *H.B.13*, p. 459, 13 June 1807. On 1 April 1807, the Hall had refused to confirm a resolution of the Standing Committee concerning harbour charges in connection with a new bill for the Floating Harbour (*H.B.13*, p. 451, 1 April 1807).

[63] *H.B.17*, p. 375, 9 March 1836; p. 382, 20 April 1836.

[64] *H.B.13*, p. 174, 11 May 1801.

[65] *H.B.14*, p. 385, 3 May 1816.

[66] *H.B.14*, p. 549, 6 May 1819.

[67] *H.B.19*, p. 161, 4 Nov. 1841.

[68] *H.B.19*, p. 181, 16 Nov. 1841.

Claxton was unanimously elected on 27 November 1841.[69] He was given a salary of 300 guineas a year out of which he was to pay his clerk, who must be approved by the Society; he was to keep the accounts of the Floating Dock and the Graving Dock in his office, and he was to receive reports from the Floating Dock and from the Bailiff of Clifton. He was required to provide two sureties of £1,500 each and he was not to vote except on admissions to the almshouse. The Treasurer's Office was to be made more convenient and was to be open from 12 to 3 daily.[70] Provision was made for his predecessor. At first, it was proposed to give him £500, but this was not pursued, and he was offered rent free for life the use of the house where he resided or a pension of £60 a year. The pension was later increased to £100 a year.[71]

Although the Treasurer was now paid, he was not required to treat it as a full-time job and was not precluded from carrying on other business. He was not even required to be in the office during opening hours, but later in 1842 it was decided to allow him the use of the room under the Treasurer's Office rent free in consideration of the advantages accruing from his attendance during the usual hours of business.[72]

William Claxton, the first salaried Treasurer, was annually re-elected until his death in 1873.[73] During his period of office, he recorded in a two-volume *Journal* a great deal of information about the business of the Society and about his personal affairs. His *Journal* is of particular interest because it often gives the inside story of events which appear less colourfully in the *Hall Books*. He had no hesitation about recording his own reactions to events and his views about some of the members of the Hall of whom he disapproved.[74]

William Claxton's father had been a Merchant Venturer and a West India merchant engaged in the sugar business.[75] He died in 1812, and in the same year his son William was apprenticed to his brother Butler Thompson Claxton. He went out to the West Indies in 1820 and on his return he set up in the West India trade on his own account. He became a Merchant Venturer in 1822 and was

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[69] *H.B.19*, p. 184, 23 Nov. 1841; p. 189, 27 Nov. 1841.

[70] *H.B.19*, pp. 204 ff., 22 Jan. 1842; p. 219, 4 March 1842. Alterations to the office were made at a cost of £230 (*Claxton's Journal I*, pp. 61, 62, 11 April 1842).

[71] *H.B.19*, p. 189, 27 Nov. 1841; p. 206, 22 Jan. 1842; p. 209, 28 Jan. 1842. Claxton records that he died aged 73 on 3 Nov. 1844, "a true Christian" (*Claxton's Journal I*, p. 100).

[72] *H.B.19*, p. 292, 21 Oct. 1842.

[73] *H.B.25*, p. 253 26 June 1873. Latimer mistakenly terminates his Treasurership in 1872.

[74] The two volumes are preserved in the Hall and I hope to edit them in due course.

[75] The biographical details given here are taken from *Claxton's Journal I*, pp. 54 ff.

Warden in 1825. In 1831, there were difficulties in the West India trade and a number of business firms in London failed. William had to ask his creditors for time to pay his debts, and they agreed to this without calling a meeting. He then went to the West Indies again, and by making great sacrifices he was able to pay his creditors fifteen shillings in the pound. He proudly records how quite unknown to him the creditors, 44 in number, drew up the following statement: "Whereas Mr. William Claxton having gone to the West Indies and being still absent for the Benefit of the Undermentioned Partners and they being assured of the High Principle which influenced him and satisfied with his exertions on their behalf, do, as a testimony of their good will, esteem, and satisfaction, request him to accept the Balance of 5/– in the Pound remaining due on their debts as a testimony of the respect they have of his character and for his exertions of their behalf." He was evidently held in high respect by his fellow Merchant Venturers. He was again Warden in 1834 and in 1838, and in 1836 he had been chosen Master.

The consequences of the emancipation of the slaves affected his fortunes adversely and he remarked "I have suffered the loss of all I ever made and my business diminished from the same Cause." It was because of business difficulties that when the Treasureship was made a salaried office, he applied for the post and was elected unanimously. He expressed his immense gratitude to God for giving him the opportunity of serving the Society, and his strong religious convictions continually appear in the prayers which he inserted in his *Journal* and in his determination to be charitable to those who irritated him. His early gratitude at getting the job gradually changed, partly as a result of conflict with particular Masters and Wardens, partly because he believed that he was overworked and underpaid. It was not a sense of humour that made him record in 1850 "I, William Claxton, was re-elected Treasurer, concluding my Ninth and commencing my Tenth Year of official servitude! ! !"[76] A year later, he remarked "The Master was peculiarly coarse and uncourteous to me." He added "To say I am happy would be untrue", but characteristically he prayed for patience and humility.[77] In 1856, he wrote "This situation is necessary for the support of my family as all private business has failed me and left me deeply in debt . . . Thus I pass on from one Committee to another and from one Master to another, striving to please each and then when I have assumed to have succeeded, another comes on to be pleased and to begin again with."[78] In 1857, he spoke of a year of "very hard and continuous servitude to one than whom I have never met his equal for unnecessary trouble and senseless egotism".[79] Personal conflicts continued to trouble him, and his own comparative poverty was evidently galling. In 1867, he remarked of the Master, Sholto Vere Hare, "Wealth has a peculiar power of hardening the heart. He who has everything around him which his most idle wish can desire, who has never known what it is to want for anything, is in great danger of becoming selfish, capricious and tyrannical – of being dead to feelings for his fellow creatures."[80]

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[76] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 155, 11 Nov. 1850.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 163, 10 Nov. 1851.

[78] *Ibid.*, pp. 201 ff., 10 Nov. 1856.

But in spite of these troubles, Claxton was re-elected year after year and was obviously regarded as a very able and experienced Treasurer who greatly improved the Society's finances. He was extremely interested in the history of the Society and he exercised great influence on its policy. His salary was increased by 100 guineas a year in 1859 and again by £100 a year in 1866.[81] By this time he was already very deaf, and he commented on his increase of salary "It was proposed in a most kind manner and most gentlemanly feeling and with my unhappy infirmity I did not hear a single word that was passing. I first saw it written in in Mr. Ward's memorandum for the Minutes! ! !"[82] In 1866, when he hurt his leg badly, the Society gave him £50 to help with expenses, and he recorded in his *Journal* "Oh Billy, are you grateful? Yes, I am and thankful."[83]

By 1872, he was clearly the Grand Old Man of the Society. The Standing Committee "considering the many years their excellent Treasurer has so zealously and so actively attended to the interests of the Society" was anxious "that he should for the future be at liberty to devote as much time and attention to the duties of Treasurer as he may find consistent with his own personal comfort and convenience . . .". It recommended that during his continuance in office his salary should be fixed at £500 per annum free of all deductions. While Claxton remained in office Mr. Barge was to be accountant at £200 per annum.[84]

It would seem that Claxton was in fact being gracefully retired from the actual work while still retaining the office. He had recorded a few months earlier that at a Standing Committee to which he had made a written report on ground rents that "All the enquiries were made to and answered by Mr. Barge and now for the first time I was not really Treasurer for I could not hear a sound and the Committee received all the replies from Mr. Barge. Oh – it cut me down so sadly because the whole business was one appertaining to me as Treasurer."[85] He was troubled by gout, and although he had three week's holiday at Weston-super-Mare which, he believed, did him a great deal of good, he did not like his new office in the Hall, remarking "Oh, so damp all was and such awful draughts tis a wonder and a great mercy that Mr. Barge and myself are able to push along. . . ."[86]

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[79] *Ibid.*, p. 207, 10 Nov. 1857. The Master in question was Thomas Porter Jose. Claxton conceded that he had a kind heart and did what he thought was right. Claxton at this time was deeply troubled by the conduct of his eldest son, but he does not reveal the nature of the trouble.

[80] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 55, 13 April 1867.

[81] *H.B.22*, p. 408, 8 Dec. 1859; *H.B.24*, p. 66, 16 Feb. 1866.

[82] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 33, 16 Feb. 1866.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 40, 3 Nov. 1866; *H.B.24*, p. 130, 2 Nov. 1866.

[84] *H.B.25*, pp. 176–7, 25 Oct. 1872.

One thing which gave him great delight at the end of 1871 was when the new Master, Henry Cruger William Miles, "told me he was determined to present the Society with a Portrait of the Treasurer (Me W.C.) to hang up in the new Committee Room." He added "I was astounded indeed and I believe I only laughed."[87] He began to sit for Mr. West in the Hall in June 1872, and the portrait was on view at the Annual Dinner in November 1872. In February 1873, the Master presented to the Hall the portrait "of one who has been endeared to us and to the past Members of our Hall . . . perpetuating in the scene of his daily labours, when he is no longer with us, the familiar features with which we have been so long and so intimately acquainted. . . ." The Committee recorded its satisfaction "in having thus secured to their possession for future generations so pleasing and faithful a Portrait of one who still present among them is loved and respected by all and whose memory will be cherished when his familiar features are only preserved to them upon their Walls . . .".[88]

The last entry in Claxton's *Journal* was on 5 April 1873 when he records that Cruger Miles's letter was read out and when he noted that all the kind things which had been said about himself applied equally to his friend Charles Ward, Clerk to the Society, who had recently died.[89]

When Claxton died in June 1873, there was a special meeting of the Hall to consider the arrangement for the funeral at which all members of the Society, the almspeople and the boys from Colston's Hospital were to be present. The bill for doctors, chemists, and for the funeral amounted to £99 4s. and was paid by the Society.[90] Claxton had not been able to save much from his salary, and on 4 July 1873 the Master reported that he had learnt with regret that Claxton's widow and family were totally unprovided for. The Hall decided to give Mrs. Claxton £200 a year and to provide £25 for the next two years to enable her son William to complete his University education.[91]

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[85] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 125, 5 July 1872.
[86] *Ibid.*, p. 123, 13 May 1872; p. 127, 1 Sept. 1872, 2 Oct. 1872.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 119, 17 Nov. 1871.
[88] *Ibid.*, p. 129; *H.B.25*, pp. 214, 215, 21 Feb. 1873.
[89] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 135, 5 April 1872.
[90] *H.B.25*, p. 253, 26 June 1873; p. 266, 18 July 1873.

The Treasurers who succeeded this remarkable man did not leave behind Journals in which they freely expressed their views, and it is consequently more difficult to say what manner of men they were. A new Treasurer was not appointed immediately because the Society was in process of reorganising the Colston Hospital Trust. A secretary would be needed to deal with this fund, and the Master suggested that in order to maintain close liaison between the Society and the Governing Body of Colston's Hospital, it might be desirable to unite the post of Treasurer with that of Secretary to the Hospital. In the meantime, John Hellicar agreed to act as Treasurer at a salary of £350 a year.[92]

When John Hellicar resigned in November 1876, it was decided that the office of Treasurer and Clerk to the Colston Trust should in future be united and if possible given to a Merchant Venturer who was to devote his full time to the work at a salary of £400 a year, rising to £500. He was to keep the office open from 10 to 5 from Monday to Friday and from 10 to 2 on Saturdays.[93] George Henry Pope was appointed on 18 November 1876.[94] He continued as Treasurer until 1901 and played a major role in the development of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and in fighting its battles with great determination in the demarcation disputes which arose between it and University College, Bristol.[95]

Pope announced his impending resignation in 1901.[96] His successor was already being groomed for office, for in 1897 Percy Liston King had been appointed a clerk in the Treasurer's office at a salary of £200 a year, which exceeded that normally paid to clerks.[97] There was a considerable amount of discussion about whether the Treasurer should continue to be responsible for the various educational foundations controlled by the Colston Trust. The amazing development of the Technical College had created a great deal of work. Consequently, it was decided that there should be a Secretary who should serve the Technical College, the Governing Body of

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[91] *H.B.25*, p. 258, 4 July 1873. On 30 April 1875, another £25 was granted to William Claxton to help him continue his studies at Oxford (*H.B.25*, p. 416, 30 April 1875). He was admitted a member of the Society on 27 January 1877 (*H.B. 26*, pp. 114, 115, 27 Jan. 1877).

[92] *H.B.25*, p. 258, 4 Aug. 1873; p. 353, 28 Aug. 1874.

[93] *H.B.26*, p. 89, 7 Nov. 1876.

[94] *H.B.26*, p. 99, 18 Nov. 1876.

[95] See pp. 381–4, 491–508. His salary was increased by £100 a year in 1890 after a report which showed that the work of the office had increased greatly since 1876 (*H.B.27*, p. 367, 19 Dec. 1890).

[96] *H.B.28*, p. 416, 11 Oct. 1901.

[97] *H.B.28*, p. 204, 29 Jan. 1897. It was raised to £300 in 1901 (*H.B.28*, p. 394, 29 March 1901).

Colston's Trusts, the Managers of Colston's Boys School and the Governors of Colston's Girls School. George Henry Pope, who had played so large a part in these developments, was obviously the man for the job and was appointed at a salary of £450 a year. The fees of the Technical College were to be continued to be collected by the Treasurer, and Percy Liston King was appointed to that office with a salary of £450 a year.[98]

The nineteenth-century Treasurers operated most of the time with a remarkably small amount of clerical assistance and were able to retain the services of their assistants for very long periods. When William Ady tendered his resignation in 1836, he had been clerk to three successive Treasurers for a period of nearly 63 years. When the Society presented him with a piece of plate to the value of £50 in recognition of "his great regularity, correctness and integrity", he said that he had been "Accomptant or Clerk" since 10 November 1773. In a touching speech recorded in the Minutes he expressed his appreciation of the gift from "such a respectable Body as this Society . . .". He told the members how he had attended the School under the Merchants' Hall for only three years from 1769 to 1772. Then his father's death made it necessary for him to find a job. He was very pleased with the career he had made for himself in the Society's service and he concluded "It may be truly said of me Is not this the Carpenter's son?"[99]

William Claxton's assistants included William Taylor Chamberlain who was taken on in 1843 but who worked only part-time, "the present Duties of the Treasurer not affording sufficient employment for the occupation of the whole time of himself and a Clerk".[100] Chamberlayne was still in Claxton's service when he died in 1859. The Hall made a grant of £25 to his widow who was with wholly insufficient means and who had 14 children, of whom 10 were completely dependent on her. He was succeeded by William Barge who had already been in Claxton's service more than two years when he was officially appointed clerk in the Treasurer's office.[101] When Claxton was given lighter duties in 1872, William Barge was officially appointed accountant to the Society at £200 a year.[102] He had served the Society for more than fifty years when he died early in 1895.[103]

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[98] *H.B.28*, p. 416, 11 Oct. 1901; p. 417, 18 Oct. 1901; p. 423, 26 Oct. 1901.

[99] *H.B.17*, p. 358, 13 Jan. 1836; p. 364, 25 Jan. 1836; p. 368, 26 Jan. 1836; pp. 390 ff., 20 April 1836. Ady had been responsible for the reorganisation of the accounting system in 1795 (see p. 114). Ady's resignation was followed by further improvements, and in 1836 the Society thanked the Treasurer for the valuable changes he had introduced. The 100 guineas usually given to Mr. Ady was to be used by the Treasurer for defraying the expenses of the accounts (*H.B.17*, p. 448, 8 Nov. 1836).

[100] *H.B.19*, p. 375, 15 Sept. 1843.

[101] *H.B.22*, p. 370, 11 Aug. 1859.

[102] *H.B.25*, p. 177, 25 Oct. 1872. He was later given a present of £150 for his extra work during the illness of the Treasurer. (*H.B.26*, p. 102, 24 Nov. 1876.)

Another clerk in the Treasurer's office who served for a very long period was T. E. Rea, who joined the staff in 1859. By 1890, his salary was £120 a year. It was then increased to £135, but he was required to begin at 9.30 instead of 10 and to collect the fees at the Merchant Venturers' School. An additional clerk was taken on at £50 a year, and the charges to the two Colston Schools for clerical services were raised from £150 to £200.[104] Rea's salary was increased to £160, rising to £200, in January 1895.[105] By 1901, he was getting £220 a year, and in 1910, after he had completed 50 years service, he was given an honorarium of £50 and an annual increase of £10 until he reached £250. He retired in 1914 after 55 years service and was given a pension of £150 a year.[106]

The clerks must have been kept busy producing the great mass of paper work, much of which still remains, and the typewriter does not seem to be much in evidence, but the conduct of business was made easier in 1887 when the Treasurer reported that "he had arranged with the Telephone Company to put his Office in connection with the telephone wires . . .".[107] In 1899, it was decided that in future the accounts should be audited by a Chartered Accountant.[108]

For the greater part of the nineteenth century, the office of Clerk was held by members of the Osborne family. Jeremiah Osborne had been appointed in 1786, and from 1796, he shared the post with his son John. When Jeremiah died in 1798, John continued on his own until 1801 when he was assisted by his brother Jeremiah. After John's death in 1810, Jeremiah was sole Clerk until 1838 when his eldest son Robert joined him. Jeremiah died in 1842 at the age of 65 after serving the Hall for 41 years. Claxton commented that he was "A man much beloved admired respected and a Gentleman." Robert acted on his own until 1854. For some time before his death, his partner Charles Edward Ward, had been doing the work, and when Robert died, he applied for the appointment which he held until his own death in 1873.[109] Jere Osborne, nephew of Robert and partner of Ward, then took over and held the post for the rest of the century.[110]

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[103] *H.B.28*, p. 94, 25 Jan. 1895.

[104] *H.B.27*, p. 370, 19 Dec. 1890.

[105] *H.B.28*, p. 94, 25 Jan. 1895. At the same time, the salary of the other clerk, George Erith, was increased to £60 p.a., rising by £10 a year, to £120.

[106] *H.B.29*, p. 391, 28 Jan. 1910; *H.B.30*, p. 189, 30 Oct. 1914. He died in 1920 (*H.B.31*, p. 43, 30 Jan. 1920).

[107] *H.B.27*, p. 197, 29 April 1887.

[108] *H.B.28*, p. 340, 28 Dec. 1899.

[109] For a eulogy on Charles Edward Ward, see *H.B.25*, pp. 220–1, 28 March 1873.

The Society's Clerks were not, of course, full-time officers. They were solicitors who found their connection with the Society very useful, not because of the small salary of £60 a year which they received for calling meetings, recording proceedings and attending committees, but because their involvement with the Society put into their hands a great deal of legal business, particularly in connection with property, for which they charged professional fees.[111] They were able to guide the Society and its committees on points of law and they were very influential advisers. Occasionally a Clerk was a little too enthusiastic. In 1843 the Finance Committee complained that the Law Accounts for 1841 and 1842 showed large arrears due to the Clerk and alleged that the Society had been led into large and useless expenditure for the purposes of procuring Parliamentary evidence and other public business for the benefit of the Port of Bristol. The Clerk was to be asked if the charges for general business could not be put on a more satisfactory basis and the Law Account presented as soon as possible after 31 October each year.[112]

In managing its estates and collecting the rents and various other payments due to it, the Society employed a number of officials, sometimes on a commission basis and sometimes for a salary. In 1818, for example, Mr. Haynes petitioned the Hall stating that he had acted as Beadle and Bailiff of Clifton and Receiver of the Society's rents there since 1784 at a salary of £40 a year. He asked for a rise, and his salary was raised to £150.[113] At the end of 1838, Mr. Marmont was appointed Superintendent and Receiver for the Clifton estates. He was to report regularly and to keep a map showing any alterations. He received 5 per cent on the rents collected and professional fees in connection with the numerous building developments in Clifton.[114]

The Somerset and Bristol rents at this time were being collected by Mr. H. Townsend. In 1841, the Hall decided that both the Somerset and the Clifton rents should be collected by the Treasurer, but after negotiations with Marmont and Townsend, it was agreed that Marmont should continue to collect the Clifton rents on a 5 per cent commission basis and that Townsend should receive a fixed salary of £130 a year.[115]

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[110] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 91; *H.B.18*, p. 219, 3 Aug. 1838; *H.B.21*, p. 189, 8 Nov. 1851; p. 248, 10 Sept. 1852; p. 328, 9 Sept. 1853; pp. 396, 397, 16 June 1854; p. 401, 4 July 1854; *H.B.25*, p. 220, 28 March 1873; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 276.

[111] For a statement of the duties and fees of the Clerk, see *H.B.18*, p. 320, 12 April 1839; *H.B.21*, p. 281, 18 Dec. 1852; p. 398, 26 June 1854. For parliamentary business, the Clerk made use of a parliamentary agent in London. *H.B.19*, p. 432, 30 March 1844.

[112] *H.B.19*, p. 377, 13 Oct. 1843.

[113] *H.B.14*, p. 518, 19 Nov. 1818.

[114] *H.B.18*, p. 113, 13 Oct. 1837; p. 293, 11 Jan. 1839; *H.B.19*, p. 197, 31 Dec. 1841; p. 202, 19 Jan. 1842.

In 1867, William Claxton, who had worked with Townsend for many years, recorded with some bitterness that Townsend, who had been Surveyor to the Society for more than 40 years, especially for the Somerset estates, had died on 4 April and left £170,000, but, wrote Claxton, "he did not leave poor me a brass farthing nor was I asked to his funeral".[116] Claxton went on to say that Townsend's nephew and partner, William Henry Davis, was on the Treasurer's recommendation appointed his successor, but not at a salary. When Davis died in 1878, Walter Stuckey Paul was appointed at a salary of £100 a year to deal with property in Bristol and the neighbourhood. He could make professional charges for all plans, but the plans were to be the property of the Society.[117]

The Society's Hall in which it conducted its business and its social activities underwent a number of changes in the course of the century. In 1838, new steps and a balustrade were ordered at an estimated cost of £65, and three years later £300 was made available for fitting up and furnishing the Hall.[118] At the end of 1842, when the Committee was considering providing new places in the Banqueting Hall, it went into the question of obtaining more effective lighting and heating. Estimates for a "warm Air Apparatus" varied from £54 to £95, and the cost of installation was estimated at £100. A Mr. H. C. Price gratuitously provided plans and drawings for this Warm Air Apparatus "which has been so successfully applied at Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and many Noblemen's Houses and Public Institutions." His estimate was £260. Resisting the temptation, the Committee decided that "the adoption of two additional Fire Places" would be "the most simple as well as economical" and it hoped that they would be sufficiently efficacious. There were already a main gas supply, and further extensions were ordered at a cost of £37 2s.[119]

In 1851, the Treasurer reported that the Hall needed decoration and repair and that little had been done since 1825. The Master was instructed "to take the opinion of a decorative Architect", and he called in Mr. Owen Jones, who had been responsible for the decorations of the Crystal Palace. Estimates of about £550 were accepted, and Owen Jones was paid 50 guineas for his services.[120]

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[115] *H.B.19*, p. 197, 31 Dec. 1841.

[116] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 57, 19 July 1867.

[117] *H.B.26*, p. 205, 25 Oct. 1878; p. 222, 19 Dec. 1878. The Society has a fine collection of plans.

[118] *H.B.18*, p. 183, 9 May 1838; p. 239, 12 Oct. 1838; *H.B.19*, p. 81, 13 Jan. 1841.

[119] *H.B.19*, p. 313, 10 Nov. 1842; p. 332, 10 Feb. 1843.

Very extensive changes in the Hall were carried out in 1871. The Society had received a gift of property in Marsh Street from Mr. Thomas Daniel, and it decided to pull down the existing offices and Mr. Daniel's house and rebuild the whole on a new plan, bringing the first floor on a level with the Reception Room and Banqueting Hall. A good Committee Room was also provided. The cost of the work was about £1,800; and another £500 was spent on decorations.[121] In 1882, improvement was authorised for the lavatories and other offices at a cost of £240.[122] Two years later the insurance on the Hall was increased from £6,000 to £10,000[123]

Throughout the period, the Society employed a housekeeper to look after the Hall. In 1810, her salary was raised to £25 a year.[124] When Mrs. Elinor Tucket resigned in 1845, Mrs. Caroline Chamberlain was appointed, and by 1866, her salary had been raised to £100 a year.[125] She had been appointed in William Claxton's time and she must have found the new regime under his successor less congenial, for in 1875, after she had served the Hall for 30 years, the Treasurer reported on the unsatisfactory character of her transactions and her constant insubordination. She was asked to resign forthwith. She asked for the matter to be reconsidered, and when this was refused, she resigned.[126] A Mrs. Burn was then appointed at £75 a year, and when she died after 19 years' service, she was succeeded by Miss Eliza Warr at the same salary. In 1898, her wages were increased to £100 a year.[127] The Hall also employed a porter, but he does not appear very often in the records. In 1893, the porter had to be dismissed for persistent drunkenness, but in view of his long service, he was given a pension of 10s. a week.[128]

The Hall was used by the Society for its annual audit dinner and for other social functions. It was situated in the heart of the city, and it was one of the means by which the Merchant Venturers could impress Bristolians with their importance. For the proclamation of George IV in 1820, members were ordered to assemble there at 11 o'clock to go in procession to the Council House "preceded by their

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[120] *H.B.21*, p. 144, 20 June 1851; p. 155, 8 Aug. 1851; p. 162, 15 Aug. 1851. *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 159; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 274.

[121] *H.B.25*, p. 30, 21 Jan. 1871; pp. 67 ff., 7 July 1871.

[122] *H.B.26*, p. 424, 22 June 1882.

[123] *H.B.27*, p. 49, 17 March 1884.

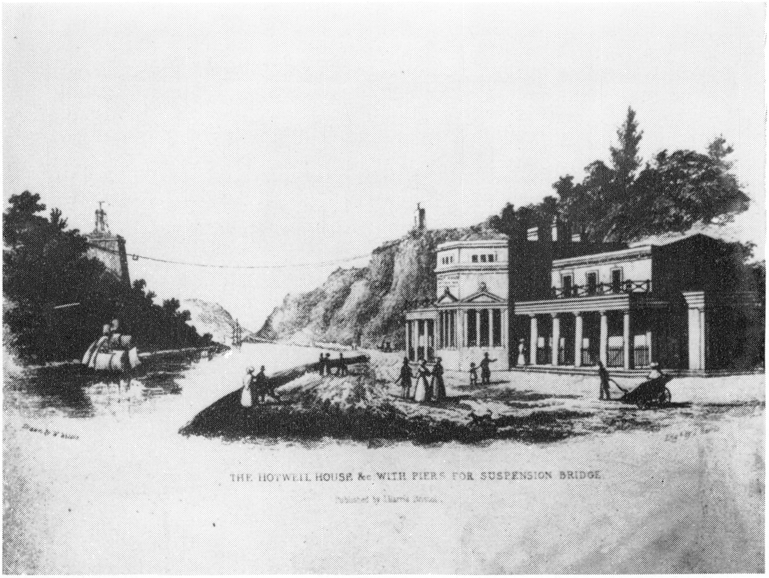
[124] *H.B.14*, p. 102, 7 March 1810.

[125] *H.B.20*, p. 143, 19 Sept. 1845; *H.B.24*, p. 143, 21 Dec. 1866.

[126] *H.B.25*, p. 395, 26 Feb. 1875.

[127] *H.B.25*, p. 422, 30 April 1875; *H.B.28*, p. 72, 25 May 1894; p. 274, 30 Sept. 1898.

[128] *H.B.28*, p. 50, 24 Nov. 1893.

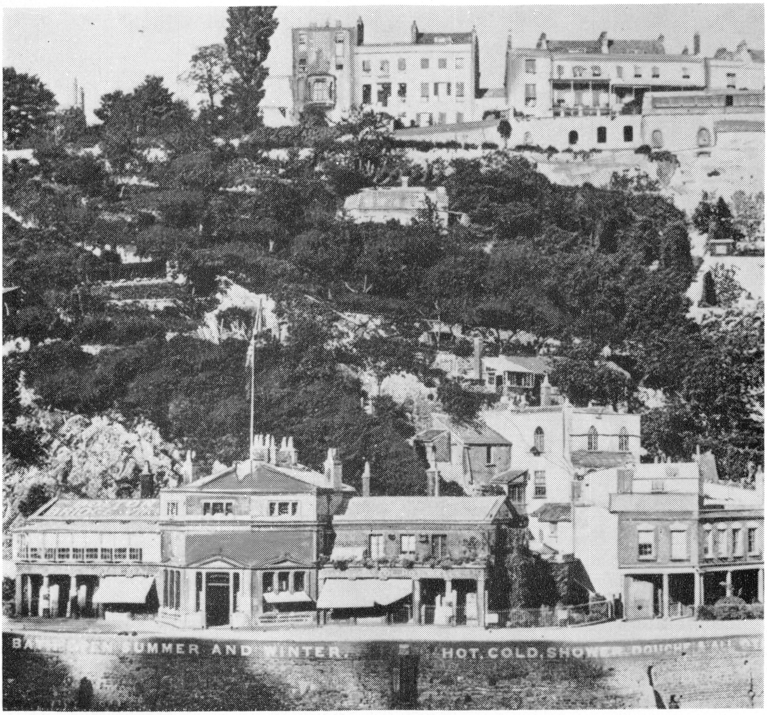

THE HOTWELL HOUSE &c. WITH PIERS FOR SUSPENSION BRIDGE

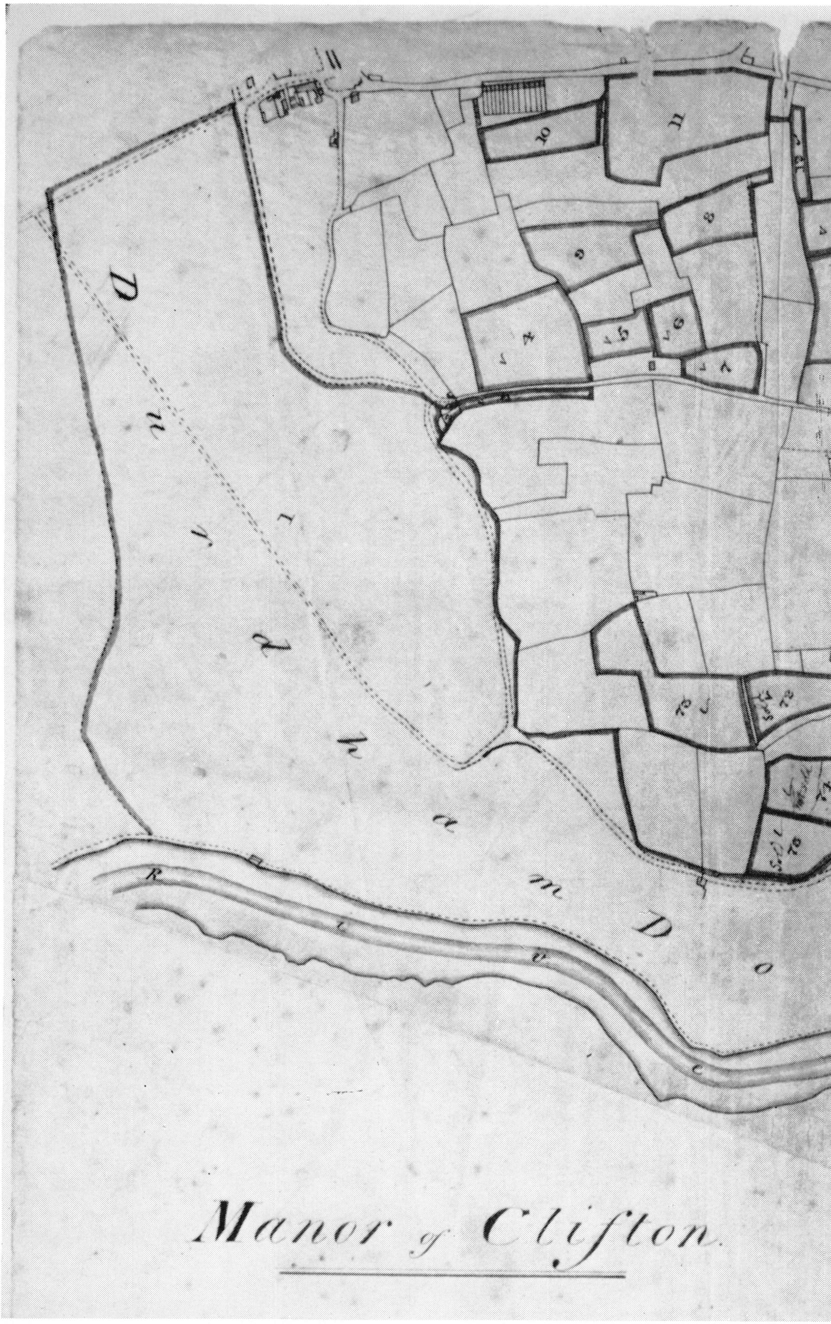
Above: Engraving showing the Hotwell House in the eighteen-thirties and the towers of the Suspension Bridge in the course of erection.

Photograph supplied by Reece Winston

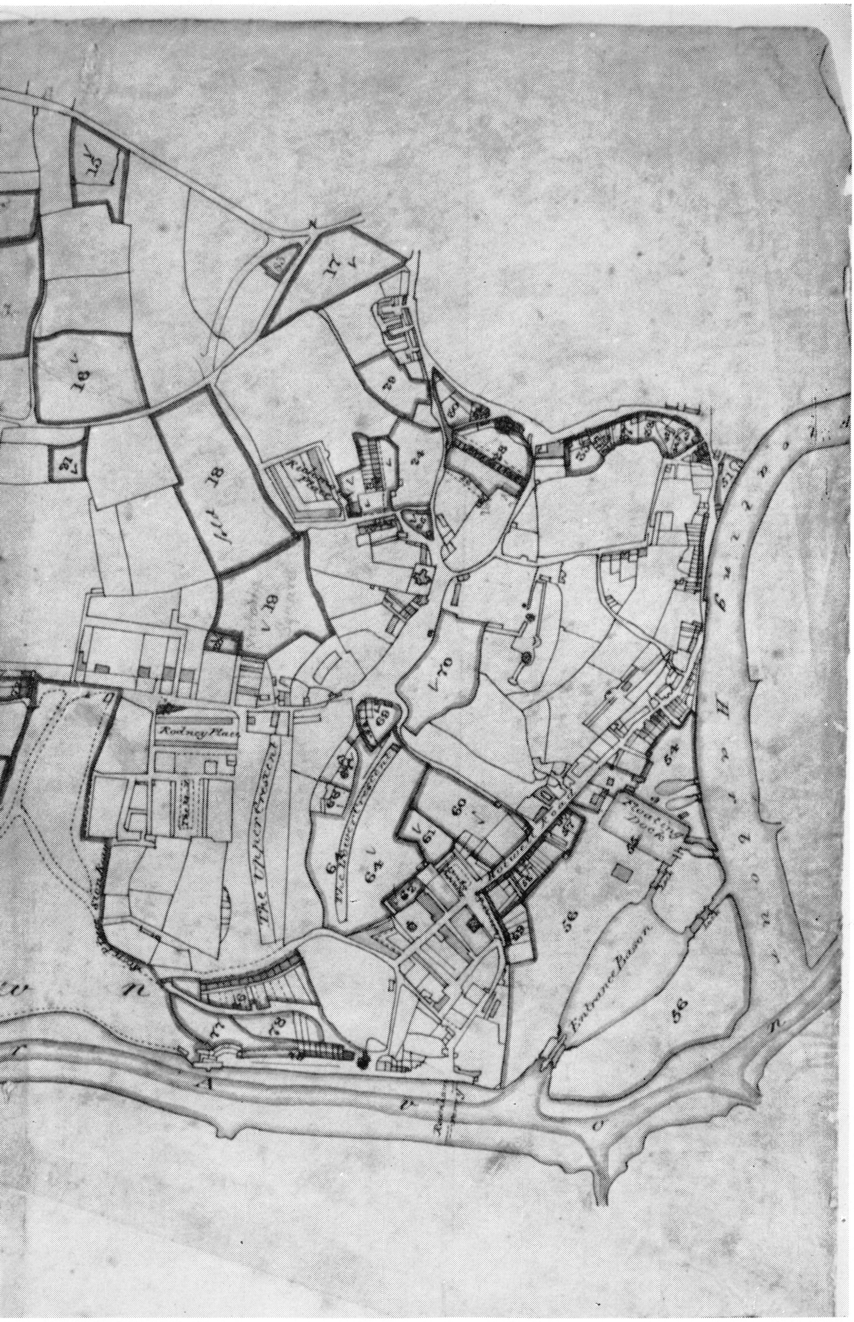
Below: The Hotwell House in the eighteen-sixties, with the Colonnade on the right of the picture.

Photograph supplied by Reece Winston


SUMMER AND WINTER.
HOT, COLD, SHOWER

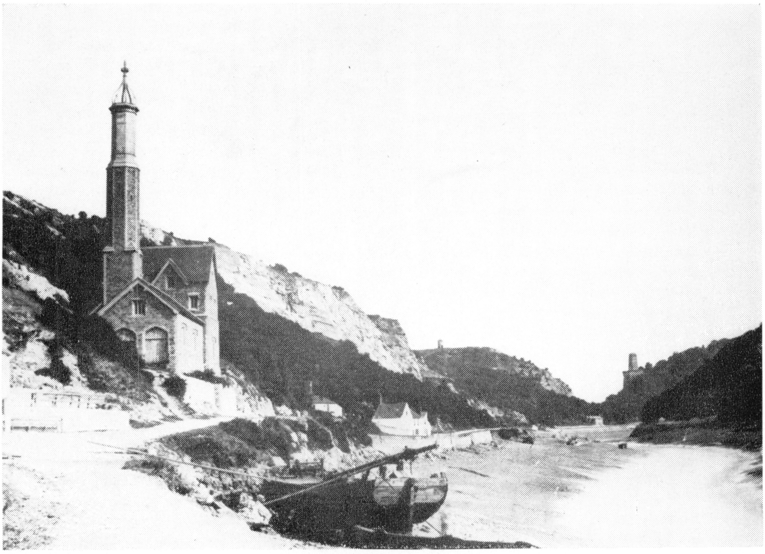

Durdham Do
Riv
Manor of Clifton

Plan of the Manor of Clifton c.1837 showing the Society's property. From a plan in the Society's *Schedule of Deeds 2*. The areas owned by the Society are outlined in black (green in the original), and are numbered from 1 to 80. Whiteladies Road and Gallows Acre Lane (Pembroke Road) are shown at


17
18
19
70
Rodney Place
The Upper Crescent
The Lower Crescent
60
61
64
Floating Dock
Entrance Bason
56

the top of the plan. The development of the various plots can be traced through the *Schedule of Deeds 2*. Plot no. 19 (Ferney Close) became Victoria Square. Plot no. 17 was Honeypen Hill field.

Photograph by G. Kelsey

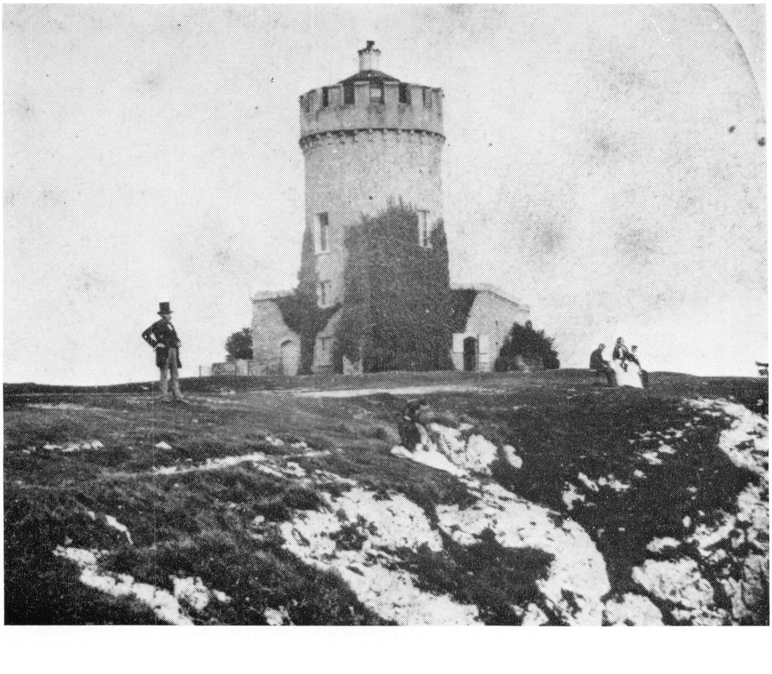


Above: The Engine House erected in 1845 to pump water up to Clifton in connection with the Society's Waterworks scheme. Demolished 1864.

See p. 426. *Photograph supplied by Reece Winston*

Below: The Observatory on Clifton Down in the eighteen-fifties.

See pp. 427-8. *Photograph supplied by Reece Winston*



Band and also the Boys of Colston's school".[129] There was another procession for the coronation and 40 guineas was provided to light the Hall, "The same to be done in a most brilliant and splendid manner according to the directions now given." Illuminations were to be continued at 15 guineas a time on subsequent nights if necessary.[130] For William IV's coronation in 1831, £25 was spent on illuminating the Hall and £10 on the band.[131]

A little earlier in 1831 the Society had been concerned about placards under the signature of Christopher Gage, Chairman of a committee calling itself the Reform Committee, announcing that a General Illumination had been determined on after the Chairing of the two successful Whig candidates in the election. The Society decided that the placards had been issued by "an irresponsible Body" and that the Hall had never been illuminated on like occasions. This was the first time that Bristol had returned two Whig candidates since 1774, and there was in fact a General Illumination and large-scale demonstrations, but the Tory Merchant Venturers were not willing to be associated with them and the Hall was not illuminated.[132]

On the other hand, the Society displayed its enthusiasm for the peace celebrations after the Crimean War. Claxton stated that although there were celebrations throughout the country and an immense display of fireworks in London, the Corporation of Bristol determined to do nothing. However, he learnt that a V.R. and a Crown were to be illuminated on the Council House. As the Master was in London, he took it on himself to act for the Society. He wrote "I had jets of gas in front along the parapets and round the arches of the Urns and Bust of King William in imitation of the Arc de Triomphe at Paris. It was a beautiful effect – along the facade at the side of the Hall in King Street I hung the old and sacred motto of Church and Queen lighted with oil and an excellent effect. It was the only building in the City which had any effect. I was commended by all." The cost was £23 10s 0d.[133]

The annual audit dinner was also held in the Hall. In 1831, after the Bristol Riots at the end of October, the Society decided that "In consequence of the riotous tumultuous and seditious Proceedings . . . which occasioned such extensive and lamentable destruction of Property by Fire and otherwise", the audit dinner should be cancelled. It was also thought wise "under the present unfortunate Circumstances" to dispense with the usual festivities of music and bell ringing on Charter Day.[134] These things would not have been wise or appropriate in a Bristol which had just had the traumatic experience of the Riots.

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[129] *H.B.15*, p. 63, 3 Feb. 1820 (only 18 members were present).
[130] *H.B.15*, p. 166, 13 July 1821.
[131] *H.B.17*, p. 48, 3 Sept. 1831.
[132] *H.B.17*, p. 20, 3 May 1831; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 142, 143.
[133] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 197, 29 May 1856.

From 1840, the audit dinner, which had hitherto been limited to a few, was thrown open to all members.[135] William Claxton the Treasurer took a great interest in the Hall Dinners and recorded many details about them in his *Journal*. In 1842, the dinner cost £64 8s. for 40 gentlemen, excluding the cost of 21 bottles of claret.[136] In 1845, the Treasurer organised the dinner himself and 72 people were present, including 14 clergymen of the established church.[137] In 1846, Claxton noted that the Mayor (J. K. Haberfield) having shown great slight to the Master and having insulted the Society over the Waterworks business was not invited.[138] Seventy-four gentlemen attended in 1852 and drank 139 bottles of wine.[139] Two years later there was difficulty with the dinner as a result of the Hall having been lent to the Corporation to enable it to entertain Lord John Russell. Claxton remarked "The dinner was beastly and the Hall was disgraced! ! ! The least said the best", but he could not stop himself adding later "The Annual dinner of the Society took place this day. It was with extreme difficulty we got the Hall and offices clean again and sweet after the Filthy entertainment held therein by the Corporation of filthy Bristol."[140]

In 1855, poor Claxton was in trouble with the Master who asked him to account for his friend Mr. Chamberlain attending the Hall Dinner without an invitation. Claxton explained that "there was a vacant chair at the ninth hour and I took him in, for which I offered apology. He wrote most offensively and I find my whole position here much changed in comfort and feeling . . . God forgive him for the distress of mind he has caused me. I do most freely believe I served him more than any of his predecessors, in fact I slaved for him."[141] The following year when Claxton did not organise the dinner himself, he recorded "The dinner was done by a man nominee, Palmer. It was a failure and many were good enough to tell me so."[142] There was a different kind of trouble in 1858. At this time, the Society was deeply divided over the question of whether Colston's Hospital should be moved outside the city. Claxton reported that "It was universally admitted that up to the removal of the Clerk everything went as perfectly as it could do and after that the apple of discord fell upon the removal of Colston's Hospital, and I would rather not record anything."[143]

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[134] *H.B.17*, p. 55, 3 Nov. 1831; p. 63, 9 Nov. 1831.

[135] *H.B.19*, p. 33, 30 Sept. 1840 (13 members present).

[136] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 73, 8 Nov. 1842.

[137] *Ibid.*, p. 112, 6 Nov. 1845.

[138] *Ibid.*, p. 119, 9 Nov. 1846.

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 170, 4 Nov. 1852.

[140] *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 183, 27 Oct. and 8 Nov. 1854.

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 194, 13 Nov. 1855.

[142] *Ibid.*, p. 199, 6 Nov. 1856.

Of the dinner of 1859, Claxton said that the Master surprised all his friends by his aptitude in filling the chair, but he added a little maliciously "No one of distinction dined."[144] In 1862, all went well, "only the Mayor Mr. John Hare kept the dinner waiting so long that the Soup was cold! . . . A great many refusals were received from Big Wigs. 70 gentlemen dined – not a single M.P.! !"[145] In 1863, "the Great Don of the Day was Captain Speke, the discoverer of the source of the Nile . . . the Mayor was punctual".[146] In 1866, there was trouble. "A scene with the cooks and waiters afterwards. . . . The Head cook was very very drunk! A woman too. Some of the waiters were also drunk, not the usual waiters but some whom I was obliged to call in owing to increased numbers."[147] In 1871, when 84 guests were present, Claxton noted that "the servants really behaved most disagreeably. Several were tipsy."[148] The next year, however, the Treasurer must have felt some compensation for all the trouble he had taken over the dinners during a period of nearly 30 years, for his portrait was on view in the new Committee Room.[149]

One very splendid entertainment in the Hall was a Fancy Dress Ball given on 24 January 1867 by the Master, Mr. S. V. Hare and his wife. Claxton was tremendously impressed and remarked that "It was as I think one of the most brilliant and beautiful and successful events I have ever witnessed." There were about 320 guests, including the Duke and Duchess of Beaufort. In a large leather-bound volume preserved in the Hall there are coloured illustrations of those who were present.[150]

The Hall was used by the Society and, on occasions, by the Corporation for the entertaining of distinguished visitors,[151] and it

[143] *Ibid.*, p. 212, 4 Nov. 1858.

[144] *Ibid.*, p. 215, 8 Nov. 1859.

[145] *Ibid.*, p. 234, 6 Nov. 1862.

[146] *Ibid.*, p. 242, 5 Nov. 1863.

[147] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 40, 8 Nov. 1866.

[148] *Ibid.*, p. 117, 2 Nov. 1871.

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 129, 7 Nov. 1872.

[150] Volume marked *Fancy Ball* which contains, in addition to the illustrations of the costumes, an account from the *Illustrated London News*, 2 February 1867, with a sketch of the scene in the Hall. Ironically, the front page of this number of the *Illustrated London News* carries on its front page a picture of "Distribution of Relief at the Mansion House to Distressed Persons of the East End" and an account of deep and long-continuing distress resulting from the commercial panic of 1866 and "the cessation or slackening of many branches of trade and enterprise".

[151] The most distinguished visitors were the Prince of Wales (George IV), the Duke of Cumberland, the Duke of Sussex, H.R.H. the Duchess of Teck, the Duke of Wellington, the last Duke of Buckingham, Earl Russell, Earl Roberts, and the Presidents and leading members of the British Association and other scientific societies during the meetings in Bristol (Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 275). Claxton, who had a weakness for the upper classes, commented on "the many Nobles Dukes and Gentlemen" who attended a Banquet for the Duke of Cambridge in 1842 (*Claxton's Journal I*, p. 66, 9 July 1842).

was sometimes made available to other organisations. In 1802, for example, the Society allowed it to be used by the Committee to honour William Pitt,[152] and in 1803 it was lent for a meeting of subscribers to the Floating Harbour.[153] It was one of the places for the distribution of the new silver coinage in 1817,[154] and the Mayor gave a Coronation Ball in it in 1821.[155] The sheriff was allowed to use it in connection with the General Election of 1831, provided he made good any damage,[156] but there was some hesitation about lending it to Major-General Charles Dalbiac to hold a Court Martial after the Riots of 1831. The Society was "very apprehensive that the use of their Hall for the purpose of holding a general open Court of Justice on an occasion so peculiarly calculated to create public excitement and curiosity" would lead to considerable damage. The City Chamberlain and the military were required to inspect the Hall and to undertake to return it in the same state as they found it.[157] In 1832 the Bristol and Clifton Horticultural Society optimistically asked to be allowed to hold monthly meetings in it but without success.[158] Next year, tables from the Hall were lent to "a large and respectable Body of the Citizens of Bristol" to enable them to hold a dinner in honour of Sir Richard Rawlinson Vyvyan who sat for Bristol in the Tory interest.[159] In 1835, the Society went out of its way to cooperate in plans to invite the British Association to Bristol "for the good of the city and the advancement of science". William Claxton, then one of the Wardens, Mr. Robert Bruce and the Clerk, together with representatives of the Bristol Literary and Philosophical Institution made a special trip to Dublin, where the Association was meeting, to invite it to Bristol in 1836.[160] The use of the Hall was also granted in connection with the establishment of some railway companies, including the Great Western Railway.[161]

An occasion which caused a good deal of ill-feeling was the loan to the Anchor Society, one of the Colston Charitable societies, in 1841 for their annual dinner on Colston's Day. Claxton stated that the Hall was left in an extremely disgusting and filthy state, as was witnessed the two following days by various members. The Anchor Society professed ignorance and asked for a full investigation, but the Merchant Venturers refused to give details or to make any further comment.[162]

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[152] *H.B.13*, p. 211, 26 July 1802. See also *H.B.14*, p. 293, 20 April 1814; p. 439, 20 May 1817.

[153] *H.B.13*, p. 249, 28 March 1803.

[154] *H.B.14*, p. 433, 12 Feb. 1817.

[155] *H.B.15*, p. 162, 29 June 1821.

[156] *H.B.17*, p. 18, 29 April 1831.

[157] *H.B.17*, p. 75, 22 Dec. 1831.

[158] *H.B.17*, p. 92, 23 March 1832.

[159] *H.B.17*, p. 164, 19 June 1833.

[160] *H.B.17*, p. 326, 5 Aug. 1835; p. 329, 16 Sept. 1835.

[161] See pp. 439–40.

[162] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 58; *H.B.19*, p. 183, 23 Nov. 1841; p. 188, 27 Nov. 1841; p. 192, 10 Dec. 1841; p. 199, 14 Jan. 1842.

Although the Society was not a patron of the arts, it acquired by gift or purchase a number of portraits of distinguished Bristolians and of members of the royal family. In 1867, William Claxton, who had a passionate concern for everything to do with the Society's history, presented to the Master an illuminated book prepared by his daughter Helen in which he gave an account of the portraits.[163] They included six portraits of seventeenth-century Merchant Venturers who had made gifts to the Merchants' Almshouse – John Whitson, Robert Kitchen, Richard Long, Joseph Jackson, Hugh Browne and Richard Vickris. Claxton said that he had been unable to find any record of the artists and remarked that his old friend, Thomas Garrard, the City Chamberlain, "used jocosely to declare that some adventurous Dutchman brought the Pictures ready painted and added the heads and faces afterwards". He stated that for many years the portraits were kept in a cellar in Colston's Hospital and that once a year, the Master, Mr. Haynes, made the boys bring them up to the Pump to wash them. He had rescued them from this barbarity and had them cleaned and varnished. The Society also had in the vestibule a portrait of George II when Prince of Wales, and in the entrance hall a portrait of Edward Colston which was either a copy of one in the Council House or another portrait by the same artist. In the outer Hall was a nameless picture which some thought was that of William Colston, father of Edward, but Claxton had his doubts about this. Over the fireplace was a portrait of Robert Bright who had played the leading role in the movement to make Bristol a free port. It was by Crush and had originally been intended for the Council House, but for some reason the Council refused to place it in their rooms and it was offered to the Society. There was a problem of how to fit it in with the panels of the Hall, and as quick action was necessary in case the Council changed its mind, Claxton had the moulding cut away from the panelling "and there he sits in all his beauty".

In the Drawing Room were five portraits which Claxton saw at an auction in 1856 and snapped up for £60. He spent another £40 on cleaning them. The Master at the time, Mr. Jose, was abroad and did not approve of the Treasurer's initiative. Claxton's comment in 1871 was that "although Mr. Jose seemed to feel I had exceeded my duty (which I admitted) I believe he has since quite pardoned it". The portraits were Queen Anne by Sir Godfrey Kneller, George I and George II, Queen Caroline and Princess Amelia, mother of

[163] Merchants' Hall: *Book presented to Thomas Barnes Master 1865–1866, by William Claxton illuminated by his daughter Helen A. Claxton, 1867.* When the freedom of the Society was presented to the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos in 1867, Claxton noted "my dear child Alice, I well know to be equal to the illuminating the copy of the Freedom". (*Claxton's Journal II*, 3 Jan. 1867.)

George III. These were thought to be the work of Hudson who was the Master of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Claxton also took the initiative in having made for the Society copies of the very large portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert which are hung over the staircase in the present Hall. After the death of Prince Albert, the Society had subscribed £100 to a public testimonial from Bristol, but as this never came to anything, he asked the Master, William Green, to let him get a portrait for the Hall. Eventually the Queen intimated that she would have no objection to copies being made of the Winterhalter portrait of herself and Albert, and Claxton "taking this as a Command", put the work in hand.

At the end of the book made by Claxton and his daughter, another Treasurer, W. W. Ward, added notes on subsequent acquisitions. They included portraits of Arthur Hart, Master and Mayor in 1688, as a boy in fancy dress at a ball at Whitehall; of William Claxton; of George Henry Pope, Treasurer from 1876 to 1900; of Percy Liston King, Treasurer from 1901 to 1914; of Jere Osborne, Clerk from 1873 to 1919; of Mervyn Kersteman King, Master in 1874 and Chairman of Colston Hospital Trust; of Alderman Thomas Daniel, Mayor in 1797 and Master in 1805–6; and of Henry Herbert Wills, founder of the St. Monica's Home of Rest, who died in 1922. There was also a bust of William Proctor Baker, Master in 1869 and Mayor in 1871, one of the most influential citizens of Bristol who played a leading role in the development of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College.[164]

The finances of the Society in the nineteenth century become much more fully documented as the period goes on than they were in earlier periods, but it is not possible here to examine all their complexities. It is necessary, however, to give some general impression of the financial position, which changed considerably during these years.

In the first thirty years of the century, income averaged about £4,300 a year, but expenditure was running at about £4,700.[165] As a result of these deficits, the estimated value of the Hall's assets or "stock" fell from about £40,000 in 1800 to a little over £25,000 at the end of 1829.[166] The position improved in the eighteen-thirties when income normally exceeded expenditure and when there were some capital gains from the sale of land. In view of the eventual termination of the wharfage lease and of the cranage dues and other assets, the Society wrote off over £14,000 from the estimated value of its "stock", but in spite of this, the value of the assets at the end of 1839 was over £34,000.[167] The Society's assets were in fact considerably under-valued, and this no doubt gave members the impression that the financial position was less satisfactory than was actually the case. It is interesting to note that when the Waterworks Committee was examining the Society's resources in 1844 with reference to the capital required for the proposed scheme, the Treasurer put the value of the Society's property, excluding the Hall and the funds held in trust, at £60,000.[168]

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[164] In this book, both Claxton and W. W. Ward give further details about the portraits which were later destroyed when the Hall was blitzed in 1941. See also *H.B.22*, p. 170, 24 June 1857; pp. 197, 198, 3 Nov. 1857; *H.B.23*, p. 216, 13 June 1862; p. 244, 10 Nov. 1862; *H.B.24*, p. 217, 4 Nov. 1867.

[165] Based on an examination of the summaries given each year in the *Hall Books*.

[166] *H.B.16*, p. 428, 8 Nov. 1830.

But whatever may have been the correct figure for the Society's assets, there was certainly difficulty from time to time in finding money to meet immediate obligations. Claxton's predecessors had to some extent to live from hand to mouth and must have been in continual fear in case some of the larger loans made to the Hall were called in. Thus, in 1801 when £3,000 was due to the bankers Ames, Cave & Co. and Miles, Vaughan & Co., it was necessary to take up money on the Society's bond in order to discharge the debt.[169] In 1804, when a debt of £1,600 was called in, the Hall had to consider whether to accept an offer of £1,000 for an annuity at 10 per cent, which was a higher rate than that laid down in the annuity tables, or whether to raise the money by borrowing.[170] In 1812, William Ady wanted to call in a loan of £1,000, and the Treasurer had to borrow £1,500 to meet this and other obligations.[171] Five years later, the Treasurer reported that he had no money in hand to meet a bill for a new crane, and £1,000 had to be taken up on bond at a rate not exceeding 4½ per cent.[172] Early next year, in an effort to reduce its commitments, the Hall gave notice to all bondholders that it intended to reduce the rate of interest from 4½ per cent to 4 per cent. Debts to bondholders at that time amounted to £24,000. The holders of bonds worth £10,500 refused to accept the new rate and asked for repayment. The Treasurer managed to raise £5,000 from James Clark at 4 per cent and £5,150 from the bankers Ames, Cave & Co., but in March 1819 Ames, Cave & Co. called in the loan and the Treasurer had to raise the money by bonds. He was also compelled to approach Mr. Deverell, from whom the Society had bought land, and ask him to delay the settlement until 24 June.

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[167] *H.B.19*, p. 46, 6 Nov. 1840. Capital written off included £5,000 on the Hotwell and £3,000 on the Dock.

[168] *H.B.20*, p. 27, 13 Sept. 1844.

[169] *H.B.13*, p. 193, 15 Dec. 1801; p. 194, 11 March 1802.

[170] *H.B.13*, p. 292, 6 June 1804.

[171] *H.B.14*, p. 224, 30 Dec. 1812.

[172] *H.B.14*, p. 452, 16 Sept. 1817; 7 Nov. 1817.

Deverell agreed to do so provided he was paid interest, but the Treasurer must have found the situation somewhat humiliating.[173] In 1827, £1,000 had to be taken up on bond to meet temporary exigencies.[174] In 1828, when a loan of £2,000 by Samuel Peach and the Rev. Dr. Charlton was called in, the Hall was fortunate to find a widow willing to lend the money at 4 per cent.[175] Its credit was certainly good, but the need to find money to repay bondholders must have made life difficult for Treasurers in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. The basic problem was a large unfunded debt, combined with the fact that expenditure exceeded income.

The Standing Committee was well aware of the inconvenience caused by having large sums on loan at short notice, and on two occasions it recommended setting up a sinking fun to redeem the debts. In 1813, it suggested making a modest beginning by investing £1,000 at 5 per cent. In addition, when payments on any life annuity ceased, the amount which would have been paid was also to be added to the fund.[176] There was another proposal in 1826 when the Finance Committee reported on the increase in the debt since 1813. The Committee thought that the Society must try to avoid considerable expense for some time to come and must also endeavour to "equalize" the amounts received from renewal fines, "to the disproportionate Amount of which in different years they attribute much of the Inconveniences which have arisen".[177] It thought that provision must be made for the liquidation of the debt with a view to the time when "a great portion of their Revenue may be lost by the expiration of the Wharfage Lease".[178] It proposed that renewal fines should in future be paid into the hands of Trustees and that a Sinking Fund should be established by appropriating for the purpose £400 a year rent from the Bonding Yard and the whole of the rents from Camp Place building lots when they started to come in.[179]

It does not seem, however, that a Sinking Fund was set up, and since expenditure normally exceeded income in the first thirty years of the century, it was not really practicable to do so.

In the eighteen-thirties, the financial situation improved. Expenditure was kept down, and it was symptomatic of the economy drive that in 1836 the Committee, "impressed with the great expediency of diminishing the expenditure", recommended to the Hall that it should "discontinue the annual vote of wine to the Representatives of the City".[180] The Treasurer was on a number of occasions in the happy position of having a surplus which he used to pay off some of the bonds. Thus, in 1833 he had £5,430 in the bank, and he was instructed to discharge 51 bonds of £100 each, beginning at No. 83 and going on to No. 167.[181] Next year, he had £2,500 in hand and was able to discharge 25 more bonds.[182] In January 1838, he recommended paying off bonds to the value of £3,175, some of them dating back to 1783, and he asked for discretion to pay off £2,175 outstanding bonds when possible.[183] Later in the year, receipts from the sale of land enabled him to reduce the debt by another £3,000.[184] In April 1839, he reported that he had repaid £5,000 to James Clark on a bond dated 25 September 1818 plus £90 8s. 2d. interest,[185] and in October he was in a position to reduce the debt by a further £3,000[186]

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[173] *H.B.14*, p. 470, 20 Jan. 1818; p. 507, 6 Nov. 1818; p. 536, 4 March 1819.

[174] *H.B.16*, p. 205, 25 May 1827.

[175] *H.B.16*, p. 297, 7 Nov. 1828.

[176] *H.B.14*, p. 258, 29 Oct. 1813; p. 277, 18 Nov. 1813; p. 294, 3 May 1814.

[177] For Claxton's comments on renewal fines, see p. 281.

[178] The wharfage lease was due to end in 1863.

[179] *H.B.16*, pp. 168–70, 8 Nov. 1826.

There was thus considerable improvement in the financial situation even before the appointment of a salaried Treasurer in 1841. Nevertheless, there was great anxiety about what would happen when the Society lost a major source of income when the wharfage lease expired in 1863, and the Society was faced by the possibility of having to pay a large sum to the Colston Trust when a suit was commenced against it in connection with the Stogursey estate.[187] The Waterworks Committee reported in 1844 that it knew of no other source except the Waterworks project from which to get an income to meet the loss which would arise when the wharfage lease came to an end, and this was probably a major factor in encouraging the Hall to go ahead with the Waterworks proposal, which would almost certainly have led to financial disaster.[188]

In 1851, the Treasurer was asked to prepare a scheme for meeting the Society's expenditure when the wharfage lease expired in twelve years' time.[189] The results of William Claxton's labours are preserved in a large volume in the Merchants' Hall. It shows receipts and payments, ordinary and extraordinary, year by year over the five years 1845–50; the net income for 1851; the estimated income for 1863 when the wharfage lease was due to expire; and Claxton's recommendations on future policy.[190]

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[180] *H.B.17*, p. 448, 8 Nov. 1836; p. 451, where the usual entry of a pipe of wine to the M.P.s was inserted and then crossed out.

[181] *H.B.17*, p. 181, 8 Nov. 1833. On 4 Dec., he reported that he had given notice to the bondholders and meanwhile had put £5,125 15s. 10d. into 5 per cent Exchequer Bills.

[182] *H.B.17*, p. 282, 17 Dec. 1834.

[183] *H.B.18*, p. 142, 10 Jan. 1838; p. 179, 25 April 1838, when he reported that bonds worth £2,975 had been paid off.

[184] *H.B.18*, p. 215, 28 July 1838.

[185] *H.B.18*, p. 318, 12 April 1839.

[186] *H.B.18*, p. 366, 11 Oct. 1839.

[187] See pp. 365–70.

[188] See pp. 413–26.

[189] *H.B.21*, p. 192, 8 Nov. 1851.

[190] It is not possible to use here all the material contained in this very detailed analysis.

Income and expenditure over the five-year period were classified under 30 headings.[191] The total income received in the five years was £39,240 0s. 9d., making an average yearly income of £7,848. Expenditure came to £36,650 10s. 8d., an average of £7,330 a year. The figure for expenditure, however, included nearly £9,000 laid out on the development of Victoria Square, and this, of course, was an investment.

Of the 30 sources of income shown in Claxton's analysis, the largest single item was receipts from wharfage which amounted over the 5 years to £16,117 5s. 7d., as against an expenditure of only £5,401.[192] Fines from the manor of Clifton brought in £6,721; the Dock Estate produced £5,304; interest on bonds, £1,543 12s. 5d.; premises let on lease for 40 years, renewable every 14 years, £1,049; premises let on rack rents, £1,407 9s. 9d.; and chief and fee farm rents in Clifton, £1,067.

The largest items of expenditure in this five-year period were £8,752 paid in interest on bonds; £8,848 18s. 10d. on developing Victoria Square; £5,401 spent in connection with the Society's obligations under the wharfage lease; £1,760 2s. 3d. spent on the Merchants' Almshouse; £1,575 on salaries; £1,507 13s. 9d. laid out on the manor of Clifton; £1,253 14s. 10d. spent on the Hall; £1,072 15s. 5d. on legal charges; and £1,007 18s. 3d. on gifts.

Claxton then made an estimate of the probable net income and probable expenditure when the wharfage lease ran out in 1863. On the basis of the figures for 1845–51, he thought that the annual income would then be £4,861 11s. 1d., that is to say there would be a drop of about £3,000 a year. Expenditure, however, would be down to £2,730 a year, giving what he called a "plus" income or annual surplus of £2,130 per annum. He calculated that in the years up to 1863, he would be able to find £1,800 a year to reduce the bond debts, and that when all the debts had been paid, including £13,000 owing to Mr. Reed, he would, with the help of fines received up to the end of 1862, have a surplus in hand of £8,350. When fines were paid up to 1865, he thought he would have a total of £17,000 in hand. The position, in fact, was not nearly as gloomy as had been feared. By 1863, the Society would be clear of debt, would have a credit balance and would have a disposable income of between £1,800 and £2,000 a year.

Claxton pointed out that his estimated surplus of £17,000 by 1865 could be achieved "without frittering away our Property at Clifton in driblets by a sale of which it would be easy to show you that you are permanently damaged to a much greater extent than you are immediately benefitted". He underlined his warning by reminding them that "your Society is the only body in this City which has retained its position, whilst others at one time coeval with it, have ceased to be and exist only by repute. Such are the Merchant Tailors' and the Coopers' Companies. In a great measure this fact may be traced to the Prudence and Wisdom of your predecessors in investing your Funds in real Property which in the other instances I have named were invested in the Funds, and so the money became available at any moment." He urged the Society to avoid temptation: "viewing the future then from the past, I cannot think it would be an advisable state of things for you to find yourselves with a large surplus amount of Money at any one time, and I state my opinion with deference, that instead of sacrificing your Property by a sale, for the purpose of paying off debts for the imaginary purpose of relieving yourselves of difficulties which really do not exist, it would be far better to invest any surplus Capital that you can in the purchase of Ground Rents, or other advantageous Property that may offer". Property which carried renewal fines should be converted wherever practicable into annual ground rents, for it was better to have a certain annual income than an uncertain one for some years with a large surplus in others. Finally, he assured the Hall that his estimated income for future years was in all probability an understatement.

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[191] See Appendix E. In addition to the main analysis, Claxton examined in detail how the particular items were made up.

[192] This included £100 a year to the Havenmaster, and between £174 and £280 a year for the borough rate of St. Stephen's parish.

As Claxton had predicted, the termination of the wharfage lease, which was made by arrangement in 1861 instead of waiting for its expiration in 1863,[193] did not involve financial disaster. The drop in income resulting from the cessation of wharfage money was more than compensated for by the increasing returns on developments in Clifton and elsewhere, and there were occasional windfalls such as £8,100 received from Mr. Proctor for the sale of land in Clifton in 1863, £10,540 from the sale to the Corporation of land required for the docks in 1866, and £11,855 10s. from the sale of land in Canon's Marsh to the Great Western Railway Company in 1900.[194] The Society thus had an annual surplus as well as money for investment in building and agricultural land and, to a small extent, in stock. This did not mean that the Society was never in debt in the second half of the nineteenth century. From time to time it found it necessary to raise capital for particular projects by taking up loans on the security of its bonds,[195] and at one time when it was overdrawn at the bank it was required to pay 12 per cent on the overdraft and hastily found a lender who would provide £5,000 for 6 months at 7 per cent.[196] In 1887, it was in debt for more than £18,000.[197] Nevertheless, all the time its assets were increasing in value and it had much larger sums available for educational and charitable activity than had been the case in the first half of the century.

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[193] See p. 313.

[194] *H.B.23*, p. 272, 20 March 1863; *H.B.24*, p. 88, 1 June 1866; *H.B.28*, p. 381, 21 Dec. 1900.

[195] For example, £4,000 at 5 per cent taken up on bond from Mr. Hicks

A brief examination of the income and expenditure account and of the balance sheet for the year ending 10 November 1914 will help to show how the position had changed since the mid-nineteenth century.[198] Income for that year was £10,078 12s. 3d., as compared with an average income of £7,848 in the period 1845–50.[199] At first sight, this seems a very modest increase and a small return for all the effort that had gone in to the development of Clifton and other property, but it must be remembered that the figure of £7,848 for 1845–50 included over £3,200 a year received from wharfage dues, which had ceased in 1861. Expenditure in 1913–14 amounted to £8,912 16s. 10d., of which £3,699 16s. 1d. was debited to the Merchant Venturers' Technical College.

The greater part of the income in 1913–14 was derived from rents and leases in Clifton and to a much smaller extent in Bristol, Somerset and Gloucestershire.[200] Interest on the loan made to the Merchant Venturers' Technical College brought in £1,759 8s. 0d. The largest item of expenditure was on the Technical College.[201] Sundry gifts amounted to £1,424 2s. 8d., salaries to £1,078 13s. 8d., and £559 11s. 1d. was spent on the Merchants' Hall.

The balance sheet for 1913–14 showed total assets valued at £208,004 10s. 4d. as against liabilities to various charity accounts of £6,770 13s. 10d. The assets consisted primarily of freehold and leasehold property valued at £113,427 2s. 11d., the property and equipment of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College valued

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Townsend in 1866 (*H.B.24*, p. 115, 17 Aug. 1866); £5,000 from W. E. George and £6,000 from J. Lead at 4 per cent in 1884 (*H.B.27*, p. 40, 25 Jan. 1884).

[196] *H.B.24*, p. 87, 18 May 1866.

[197] *H.B.27*, p. 228, 23 Dec. 1887.

[198] The accounts and balance sheet are given in Ledger No. 8, pp. 327 ff.

[199] See p. 280.

[200] In 1913–14, fee farm and ground rents in Clifton brought in the net sum of £4,855 1s. 5d.; premises let at rack rent brought in £2,265 9s. 7d., and there were some relatively small amounts from Farm and Cathanger and from marsh land in Canington in Somerset, as well as £156 from the Stapleton estate in Gloucestershire. Clifton fee farm and ground rents in 1900 had amounted to £4,467 12s. 11d., net, and in 1911 to £4,948 12s. 5d. net (*Ledger No. 8*, pp. 7, 10).

[201] The actual grant in money was smaller than this, because at this stage the Society included in the figure a notional element of rent which it could have asked for the use of the premises but which it did not in fact collect. The rent which it might have demanded was regarded as part of its grant to the College. The Society also charged interest on the loan made to the College.

at £55,969 14s. 0d., investments in various stocks valued at cost at £25,203 0s. 8d.;[202] the Hall, valued at £6,000, and cash in the bank of £5,254 12s. 9d.

The resources of the Society in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century did not constitute "immense wealth", as was popularly believed, but the Society had a comfortable income which enabled it to make a significant contribution to educational and charitable activity and most of its capital was in urban property which was likely to increase very considerably in value.

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[202] Including nearly £12,000 in Bristol Corporation debenture stock; £4,568 in Consols; £2,535 1s. 0d. in 3 per cent Transvaal Loan; £2,000 in Canadian 4 per cent stock; £647 10s. 0d. in the Leigh Woods Land Company; £500 in Bristol Industrial Dwellings; £440 in Clifton Suspension Bridge Company.

CHAPTER 17

The Society and the Trade of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century

THE SOCIETY'S OWN ACTIVITIES

IN the nineteenth century, the Society gradually withdrew from the numerous activities relating to commerce in which it had hitherto been engaged, but the smile remained long after the Cheshire cat had vanished, and the Society continued to think itself as consisting of "commercial men" and as having an important part to play in trade, even when the reality was very different. In 1835, the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations remarked that the Merchant Venturers "do not exercise any authority whatever over the other merchants of Bristol, but they adhere so far to the spirit of their original institution, that they consider themselves incorporated for the purpose of watching any public proceedings relative to the port and trade of the city, and of interposing with their collective influence accordingly as they judge these to be advantageous or otherwise".[1] As late as 1861, the Society when opposing a bill to regulate pilotage in the Bristol Channel decided to petition against it in its own right "as the recognised Guardian of the Mercantile interests of the port of Bristol".[2]

Direct intervention in relation to the commercial policy of the government or of the municipal corporation seems in effect to have petered out within the first quarter of the century, although there were occasional flickers of activity in later years. Even within the early part of the period there was a much smaller concern for trade than there had been in the eighteenth century. The Society seems to have been much more involved with its own interests than with the general commercial difficulties of Bristol, and it was left to the West India Society and the Chamber of Commerce to act as pressure groups at a time when the trade of Bristol was suffering from relative stagnation.[3]

During the renewal of the war with France between 1803 and 1815, the Society intervened on a few occasions to try to influence government policy. In 1803, for example, the Standing Committee approved a Memorial to the Treasury against a proposal to charge the same duty on wine in the outports as was charged in London. It claimed that the wine merchants of Bristol often had to send out vessels in ballast, unlike the Londoners who could always be sure of a plentiful supply of cargoes for export. The Londoners, moreover, could bring back their wine in many bottoms, they were always sure of their supplies and they did not have to keep big stocks. London had the Court, the Parliament, the Courts of Justice and an immense population and could in addition count on "the partiality the Kingdom in general have to wine imported into the Capital . . .".[4] The plea for special treatment for the outports was reminiscent of those which the Society had made on so many occasions in the past against the unfair advantages enjoyed by Londoners.

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[1] *Report from the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations in England and Wales; Bristol*, 1835, p. 56.

[2] *H.B.23*, p. 97, 15 Feb. 1861.

[3] For the West India Society and the Chamber of Commerce, see pp. 291–4, 294–306.

Three years later, Lord Sheffield, who had often put the case for the merchants of Bristol in the House of Commons, alerted the Hall to the threat from a bill for permitting the import and export into the West Indies and South America of certain goods carried by neutral ships in time of war, and the Hall decided to petition against the bill.[5]

In 1812, the Society's ancient enemy, the East India Company, was under attack at national level from opponents of its monopoly. It is significant that in Bristol the initiative was taken not by the Society but by an *ad hoc* Committee on the East India trade which met at the Commercial Rooms on 28 March 1812. It asked the Society to support it by petitioning both Houses against the renewal of the Company's Charter and by contributing to the cost of the campaign.[6] The unusually large number of 35 members were present at the Hall which agreed to petition and to give £100 to the Committee of Merchants, Traders and others who were endeavouring in and out of Parliament to obtain a share in the trade.[7] The attempt was not immediately successful, and in 1813, the Society again agreed to petition both Houses on the same lines as in the previous year.[8] Interest seems to have declined by that time, since only 11 members were present at the meeting. The attack on the East India Company met with partial success, and the trade to India (except in tea) was thrown open in 1814.

Another issue on which the Society intervened in the war years concerned the Orders in Council of 7 January 1807 and 26 April

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[4] *H.B.13*, p. 247, 28 March 1803; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 131, 132, 28 March 1803.

[5] *H.B.13*, p. 383, 2 May 1806; p. 386, 5 May 1806.

[6] *H.B.14*, p. 187, 4 April 1812.

[7] *H.B.14*, p. 194, 14 April 1812; *Letter Book II 1781–1816*, pp. 415, 417, for letters to the M.P.s and others.

[8] *H.B.14*, p. 230, 4 Feb. 1813; *Letter Book II 1781–1816*, p. 437.

1809, which were England's reply to Napoleon's Continental System. They placed the areas controlled by Napoleon under a blockade and made trading by neutrals extremely difficult. It became much harder to export English manufactured goods to Europe through neutral powers, and certain branches of English industry were adversely affected. When England experienced serious economic difficulties in 1812, there was considerable criticism of the Orders in Council, particularly in industrial areas. The merchants of Bristol were evidently gaining advantages from the blockade of French ports and the restrictions placed on neutrals, and in May 1812 the Society petitioned the House of Lords expressing concern at "the industrious attempts of evil-disposed and of ignorant Men to excite the lower orders of the Community to Acts of Tumult and Disorder and destruction of their own happiness, and disgraceful to the National Character, by various misrepresentations of the causes which have produced a check to our Commerce, and a consequent want of full employment in some of the manufacturing Districts of the Country". The Society lamented that misguided men had been taught to believe that the repeal of the Orders in Council would benefit the commerce of the country. It regretted the distress, but thought it was due to the unprecedented decrees of the ruler of the French Empire, issued "without regard to the Distress of the People over whom he has extended his Iron Sceptre . . .". The Orders in Council were a retaliatory measure and had been most effective in destroying the trade of the enemy. The Society claimed that the commerce of this country was finding new channels of intercourse with Europe for the sale of British goods and West Indian produce and that these had nearly superseded the American carrying trade. America had foregone her neutral advantages,[9] and trade with South America was now carried on almost exclusively by British subjects. The trade of our own American colonies had been greatly encouraged. If the Orders in Council were repealed, England and her colonies would be deprived of these advantages, the ports of the enemy would be open to neutrals and the carrying trade would be thrown into their hands.[10]

When the war came to an end in 1815, the Society presented the freedom to Viscount Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty, in recognition of his judicious disposal of the naval forces in the late war and the powerful protection given to the trade of Bristol.[11]

In the post-war years, the Society intervened from time to time on a number of comparatively minor matters affecting trade. In 1817 and 1818, for example, it sent Memorials to the House of

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[9] England and the United States had gone to war in 1812.

[10] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 140 ff. Petition presented May 1812.

[11] *H.B.14*, p. 372, 8 Nov. 1815.

Lords asking for the repeal of an Act of 51 George III for the better securing of excisable goods on ships.[12] In 1819, as a result of a letter from Liverpool, it sent a Memorial to the Commissioners of the Treasury complaining about the many oaths required in the Customs House and made the interesting comment on commercial morality that "the Practice of transacting Business on Oath has proved most seriously injurious to the Morals of the Parties concerned in it. The general and indiscriminate resort to so sacred an appeal has gradually weakened its effect until it has become utterly inadequate to the end for which it was originally instituted . . .". The Society argued that the practice did not achieve its purpose of preserving the revenue and was "destructive of the National Morals by weakening that Veneration for the Supreme Being on which alone the obligation of an Oath as well as all moral virtue must depend . . .".[13] It did not add that swearing to a false statement made the merchant liable to prosecution for perjury.

In 1821 the Society gave its support to the ship owners who were opposing a bill then before parliament for assessing ships for the poor rate. As there was no time to call a Hall in the absence of the Master, it decided to write to the M.P.s for Bristol and Gloucestershire.[14] Two years later, it was much concerned to obtain the repeal of an Act of 1820 concerning insolvent debtors. It claimed that as a result of this and other acts "Insolvencies which were usually the effect of Misfortune or Imprudence are now continually the work of contrivance." There was now little fear of imprisonment, and consequently "that sense of Shame and Pride of Character, which distinguished the British Trader, and forms one of the best securities of Commercial Credit, is now so far undermined, that it is become no uncommon practice for Debtors to threaten having recourse to the benefit of the Acts, if pressed for payment of their Debts . . .".[15]

Although there was a special pressure group in Bristol concerned with West Indian interests, the Society itself was sufficiently concerned in 1823 to petition the House of Commons against a proposal to adjust the duties on sugar imported from the East and the West Indies in favour of the East Indies. It claimed that Bristol's trade with the West Indian colonies was by far the most considerable part of its foreign commerce and that the proposal would damage a large portion of the western part of the Kingdom "of which Bristol

[12] *H.B.14*, p. 426, 19 March 1817; p. 489, 19 May 1818; p. 492, 26 May 1818; *Letter Book III 1816–1826*, pp. 42, 43. See also an earlier effort to repeal the Act, *H.B.14*, p. 333, 30 March 1815.

[13] *H.B.15*, p. 9, 1 July 1819 (9 members present); *Book of Petitions*, pp. 152, 153. Presented July 1819.

[14] *H.B.15*, p. 135, 20 Feb. 1821.

[15] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 166–8, 11 Feb. 1823. See also *Letter Book III 1816–1826*, pp. 235, 239, 240, 241 for letters to the M.P.s and the press.

may, in a Commercial view, be considered as the Centre and Capital". The trade was already depressed and the planters had been seriously affected, and it was "with the utmost surprise and alarm" that the Society had learnt of proposals which would increase the distress which had already nearly overwhelmed the planters.[16]

In the same year the Society was concerned with a more local issue when it received a letter from the traders in Ilfracombe asking for support against a bill which proposed to increase the duties payable in the port for the benefit of the lord of the manor. As the port was useful to Bristolians, the Society decided to ask the M.P.s to oppose the bill.[17]

In the mid-eighteen twenties, the Hall became involved, rather unwillingly, in the fierce attack launched by the newly-established Chamber of Commerce on the Mayor's Dues and the Town Dues, which were alleged to be crippling the trade of Bristol. The relations between the Society and the Chamber of Commerce are discussed elsewhere,[18] but a report from the Society's committee on Town Dues is worth noting here because it shows that at least some members were keenly interested in the commercial future of Bristol, even though the Society as a whole had long ceased to give a lead. The Committee affirmed that the *ad valorem* duties imposed by the corporation deprived Bristol of "The Advantages which to an incalculable extent are now enjoyed by the Town of Liverpool, and may soon perhaps be possessed by other places rising into importance. . . ." It pointed out that as long as the manufactures exported by Bristol were situated at their present distance from the city, Bristol would be at a disadvantage, and the Committee thought it highly impolitic to add to the evil by imposing heavy duties, especially at a time when "by the energy of the Traders and the bringing into operation of improved modes of Inland Communication" the difficulties arising from distance might in part be overcome. It pointed out "that in this Age of Commercial Adventure valuable manufactures are continually finding for themselves new situations", and it thought that it was of the greatest importance that the City of Bristol should offer to such manufactures every encouragement to establish themselves in the neighbourhood "by such modification of the Dues of the Port as may promise a cheap and advantageous means of sending the surplus of their Productions through Bristol to Foreign Markets". It stressed with enthusiasm the potentialities of the new Empire of the Brazils and the independent governments of South America, "at present known only by name in the city". An

[16] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 169–70, March 1823; *H.B.15*, p. 305, 14 March 1823.

[17] *H.B.15*, p. 308, 1 April 1823; *Letter Book III 1816–1826*, pp. 253, 254.

[18] See pp. 294–306.

immense trade employing shipping to an unbounded extent could only be attracted to Bristol by encouraging the export of such goods, and any duties which operated to their prejudice could be fatal.[19] In all this the Committee seemed to be making an effort to break down the complacency and conservatism which was typical of many Bristolians in the first half of the nineteenth century, but in the end the Society found itself in alliance with the conservative Corporation against the new Chamber of Commerce which had started the agitation.[20]

It seems clear from this report that in 1825 at least some members of the Society were deeply concerned about the whole question of Bristol's future in the changing economy, but in the second quarter of the century, the Society did not attempt to work out a commercial policy for the city, and its intervention in commercial affairs was sporadic and limited to particular issues which were drawn to its attention. In 1826, for example, it received a letter from one of its members, Henry George Fowler, stating that the government was thinking of confining the admission of foreign silk exclusively to London and that Liverpool had already petitioned against the proposal. The Clerk contacted the Bristol Chamber of Commerce which told him that it had alerted Richard Hart Davis, M.P. and the Society instructed the Clerk, who was then in London, to see the M.P.s on behalf of the Society.[21] In 1830, the limited monopoly of the East India Company was being questioned in Parliament and the House of Commons appointed a Select Committee to report on the trade with the East Indies and China. Only 9 members of the Society, 8 of whom were members of the Standing Committee, were sufficiently concerned to attend the Hall in April 1830, when it was decided to petition both Houses asking for the abolition of all restrictions on trade with India and China. The petition alleged that commercial monopolies limited commerce and gave an unfair advantage to other nations, and such a monopoly in the hands of persons who exercised sovereignty was peculiarly prejudicial.[22] In this, the Society was merely giving its support to an agitation which had begun elsewhere, and its interest seems to have been limited. In 1833, Parliament removed the remaining restrictions on the trade.

Other occasions on which the Society intervened in relation to foreign trade included an attempt in 1831 to get the Treasury to amend the regulations concerning the duties payable on foreign corn;[23] a request in 1834 that Bristolians should have the same privileges as Londoners with regard to the export of rum;[24] and a complaint to the Treasury in 1834 about the inconvenience of not having a proper Customs House in Bristol.[25] In 1839 the Society, which had established its own bonded warehouse, protested against a bill which proposed to extend to inland towns the privilege of having such warehouses for foreign goods,[26] and in 1844 it protested to the Council for Trade and Plantations that a proposal by the South Wales Railway to put a bridge across the Severn at Frampton would do serious damage to Bristol's river trade in corn, which was said to amount to about 90,000 tons a year.[27]

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[19] *H.B.16*, pp. 41–5, 11 March 1825 (10 members present).

[20] See pp. 295–300 for details of the dispute and the role of the Society in relation to the Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce.

[21] *H.B.16*, p. 127, 18 April 1826.

[22] *H.B.16*, p. 385, 16 April 1830; *Letter Book IV 1826–1833*, p. 243 for letters to the Duke of Beaufort and the M.P.s.

On a number of occasions, the Society was concerned with communications, port dues, lighthouses and pilotage which were indirectly related to trade, but these can be better considered elsewhere. After 1850, there seems to have been only two occasions when it intervened on matters concerning foreign trade. The first was in 1853 when it sent a Memorial to William Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer, concerning the duties on soap. It claimed that many of the memorialists were engaged in the African trade and that many British manufactured goods were exchanged for palm oil. The trade was "of the greatest assistance in putting an effective stop to the odious Slave Trade". Imports would be greatly increased and the manufacture of soap would cease to be "at an almost stationary point" if the excise on soap was removed. For full measure, the Society added that the excise was very oppressive to the poor and "in direct opposition to all measures which have references to sanitary improvement".[28] The second and final intervention on a major issue of trade was in 1855 when, during the Crimean War, James Bush raised the question of trade with Russia. The Society decided to petition both Houses to ask the government to compel Prussia to close the overland trade with Russia[29].

It seems clear that in the first half of the nineteenth century the Society of Merchant Venturers gradually ceased to play an important role in representing the commercial interests of Bristol and failed to give any lead during the period when the city was undergoing relative stagnation and being outclassed by more vigorous rivals. The Merchant Venturers claimed in 1861 to be "the recognised

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[23] *Letter Book IV 1826–1833*, pp. 322, 323, 5 July 1831.

[24] *Letter Book IV 1826–1833*, p. 363, 4 April 1832.

[25] *H.B.17*, p. 208, 5 Feb. 1834. The Customs House had been burnt down in the Bristol Riots of 1831.

[26] *Book of Petitions*, p. 194, 13 July 1839.

[27] *Book of Petitions*, p. 213, 29 Nov. 1844.

[28] For the Memorial, see a large volume entitled *Reports of Committees 1844–1856*, n.p. 15 March 1853

[29] *H B.21*, p. 469, 12 April 1855; p. 477, 20 April 1855.

Guardians of the Mercantile interests of the port of Bristol",[30] but they made this claim primarily in order to bolster up their case for continuing to control pilotage in the Bristol Channel rather than because they really believed that it corresponded to reality.

THE MERCHANT VENTURERS AND THE WEST INDIA SOCIETY

Many of the economic issues which in earlier periods had been dealt with by the Society of Merchant Venturers were handled in the first half of the nineteenth century by the West India Society.[31] The records of that Association have been preserved among those of the Society of Merchant Venturers, not because the two bodies were closely associated but because of the accidental circumstance that William Claxton, who became Treasurer of the Society in 1841, also took over the secretaryship of the West India Society on 11 May 1843 when Charles Payne resigned through ill-health.[32] Although it is not possible here to give a full account of the West India Society, it is necessary to comment briefly on it, since it appears in part to have filled a gap left vacant by the Merchant Venturers. It may well have seemed a more effective pressure group to West India merchants than the older organisation.

The Society consisted of a group of between 20 and 30 members paying an annual subscription of £5 5s. For much of the period it was under the chairmanship of Thomas Daniel, who was a Merchant Venturer, but its secretary from 1814 to 1843 was Charles Payne who did not belong to the Society. Although the Treasurership of the Merchant Venturers and the Secretaryship of the Society were in the hands of the same man from 1843 onwards, this was a personal link and not an indication that the two organisations now intended to work in close association. There was, it is true, some overlap in membership. In 1806, for example, at least 12 out of the 22 members of the West India Society also belonged to the Merchant Venturers, but only 7 of the 27 members listed in 1833 were Merchant Venturers.[33] Some Merchant Venturers like Thomas Daniel, William Claxton, Philip Prothero and Philip Miles played a prominent part in the affairs of the Society, but there are few references in the Minutes of either organisation to cooperation with the other. The Society seems to have shown little interest in West Indian problems, even though the trade was one of the most important parts of Bristol's commerce and faced a critical situation when it was proposed to abolish slavery.

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[30] *H.B.23*, p. 97, 15 Feb. 1861.

[31] For its work in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, see pp. 237–8.

[32] Claxton had been involved in the West India Trade and was a member of the Society from 1825. The records preserved in the Merchants' Hall include *Book of Proceedings 1782–1834* (which in fact goes up only to 1805); *Book of Proceedings 1805–1821*, *Book of Proceedings 1822–1838*; *Treasurer's Accounts 1816–1855*; *Book of Proceedings 1839–1857* and a box of papers marked *West India Colonies* which contains miscellaneous bundles of papers and letters up to 1854. The papers have now been catalogued by Miss Elizabeth Ralph.

[33] Based on the accounts and lists given at the end of the Society's *Proceedings 1805–1819* and *Proceedings 1822–1838*.

During the war years up to 1815, the West India Society was extremely busy asking for convoys for the West India fleet and keeping in contact with the Admiralty and the M.P.s.[34] It was also a good deal more active in commercial matters than was the Merchant Venturers. Anything affecting the trade in rum and sugar was of special concern to it, and it frequently petitioned the Treasury and the House of Commons and lobbied the M.P.s.[35] It endeavoured to stop the use of grain in distilling.[36] It called a meeting of shipowners to oppose a proposed tax on shipping in 1812,[37] it offered resistance in 1813 to a suggestion that American cotton might be imported in neutral ships,[38] and it tried to stop the pressing of mates from merchant ships of over 50 tons.[39]

After the war, the West India Society was very much concerned with the threat presented by those who wished to control or abolish slavery.[40] In 1816, for example, it was informed by the Chairman of the West India Committee in London of a proposed bill to establish a registry of slaves, and it organised a meeting in Bristol of planters, merchants and others interested in the West India trade to petition against the bill.[41] In 1822, the Society petitioned the House of Commons about the distressed state of the West Indies, they were suffering from competition from Cuba and Brazil, which were continuing the slave trade "in direct violation of those principles of humanity which have been so powerfully advocated by your Honourable House".[42]

The Bristol West India merchants knew that the tide was running against them and that they needed all the help they could muster. When they heard in 1824 of a suggestion that a national West India Company should be formed, they did not react with horror against the proposal and they thought that if it did not interfere with the private traders, it might be a powerful counterpoise to "that unrelenting hostility which is now in such full activity against the Colonial Interest".[43]

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[34] See, for example, *West India Society Proceedings*, 31 Oct. 1800; 28 Nov. 1800; 22 Sept. 1803; 2 Nov. 1803; 4 Nov. 1803; 7 Nov. 1803; 8 Feb. 1804; 19 Sept. 1804; 28 Oct. 1804; 15 Nov. 1804; 21 Dec. 1804; 22 June 1805; 27 May 1808; 8 Jan. 1810, and a large number of other references.

[35] There are very many examples in the *Books of Proceedings*.

[36] *Book of Proceedings*, 13 Dec. 1810; 16 Mar. 1811.

[37] *Ibid.*, 23 July 1812.

[38] *Ibid.*, 29 April 1813.

[39] *Ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1813.

[40] There is a great deal of information in the *Books of Proceedings* about the long drawn-out resistance to abolition. The subject can be touched on only briefly here, but it is being examined in detail by Professor Peter Marshall.

[41] *Book of Proceedings*, 1 Feb. 1816; 12 Feb. 1816; 13 Feb. 1816; 15 July 1816. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of the mayor. The bill was regarded as "of most dangerous tendency" and likely to cause "suspicion and alienation from that respect and deference, which are now paid to local Governments".

[42] *Book of Proceedings*, March 1822.

In the later eighteen-twenties, the threat from the abolitionists grew, and the Bristol West India Society gave vigorous support to the West Indian interests in London as well as engaging in a propaganda and fund-raising campaign in Bristol.[44]

The battle was lost in 1833 and slavery was abolished in the British Empire. The Bristol West India Society then tried to do what it could to save something from the disaster. It fought to ensure that the expenses of the Commission which allocated compensation to slave-owners should not be paid out of the £20 million voted by Parliament for compensation,[45] and it endeavoured from time to time to highlight the labour problems resulting from emancipation. Thus, in 1839 its Chairman, Thomas Daniel, called the attention of the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the difficulties "arising from an indisposition of the negroes to work for wages and in many cases to work at all".[46] In cooperation with London, Liverpool, Glasgow and Dublin, the West India Association supported schemes to facilitate immigration into the West Indies from America, India and elsewhere[47] and tried to bolster up the economy by resisting changes in the duties on East India produce and foreign sugar, coffee and cocoa.[48]

For a Society which claimed to speak for the mercantile interests of Bristol, the Merchant Venturers were strangely silent about the West India trade at a time when it was facing very serious problems both before and after emancipation. It is perhaps understandable that they did not want to become involved in the issue of slavery, for slavery was becoming a dirty word, and even the West India Association thought in 1829 that it could not easily dispose of its literature, since it would be difficult "to procure the consent of any respectable bookseller in Bristol to mix himself up with the controversy over the West India Question".[49] Nevertheless, slavery was not the only issue of concern to West India merchants, and the failure of the West India Society to seek or to receive support from the Merchant Venturers on matters relating to the West Indies is difficult to explain, except on the assumption that the Merchant Venturers were not interested and did not consider intervention either desirable or necessary.

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[43] *Ibid.*, 26 April 1824; 3 May 1824.

[44] *Ibid.*, 19 April 1826; 25 July 1829; 12 Dec. 1829; 9 Jan. 1830; 16 June 1830; 6 Dec. 1830; 21 April 1831; 26 July 1832; 11 Feb. 1838; April 1833; 12 May 1833. See also "*West India Association Petitions, resolutions etc.*" *1813–30*, *Reports, Petitions and Miscellaneous Papers 1813–1826* and *1827–1830*, and *West India Association Letters 1830–1835*.

[45] *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1833.

[46] *Ibid.*, 4 April 1839; 4 May 1841.

[47] *Ibid.*, 24 March 1849; 1 Feb. 1853. The Association's letters 1845, 1846 and 1847 relate to attempts to get government support for immigration from India and later letters relate to a proposal to bring coolies from Hong Kong.

[48] *Book of Proceedings*, 11 March 1840; 5 Feb. 1841; 25 May 1844; 18 July 1846.

THE SOCIETY AND THE BRISTOL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The failure of the Society to give effective leadership to the commercial interests of Bristol in the early nineteenth century was an important factor in the establishment in 1822 of a new organisation, the Chamber of Commerce, which was founded in order to fight vigorously for the business community against what was considered to be a self-interested corporation and a lethargic and complacent Society of Merchant Venturers. The man primarily responsible was John Matthew Gutch, owner and editor of a local newspaper *Felix Farley's Journal*. Under the pseudonym of Cosmo, Gutch printed in his paper between October 1822 and April 1823 a series of open letters, including a number addressed to the mayor, the Corporation, the Docks Company and the Society of Merchant Venturers, in which he emphasised the decline of Bristol relative to rival ports and denounced, among other evils, the variety of duties imposed on those who used the port.[50] Although he probably exaggerated the significance of the port dues in the relative decline of Bristol, he undoubtedly created a considerable stir in that complacent city and pointed to the need for vigorous leadership if the decline was to be arrested.

Four of Cosmo's letters were addressed directly to the Society and made criticism ranging over a wide field. Like the Corporation, the Merchant Venturers were "a self-elected and uncontrolled body" and the method of entry into the Society made it inefficient for effecting any great public good, apart from the administration of charities. They had done nothing to lighten the heavy local taxes and had indeed added to them.[51] He asked them "Have you latterly come forward . . . as the liberal projectors, the disinterested patrons and promoters of any modern improvements for the benefit of our city and port. . . ?[52] Does your Society watch over the imposition of whatever public burdens the Legislature may see fit to impose upon trade. . . ? Do you collect and concentrate commercial information, and disseminate it for the benefit of your fellow-citizens? Do you assist them with your advice on difficult cases? Do you now Arbitrate for them in Disputes? – the principal object for which your Society was first instituted! ! Or do you interpose the weight and influence of the members which compose your Body to obtain redress, where individual exertions have failed. . . ?[53]

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[49] *Book of Proceedings*, 12 Dec. 1829.

[50] *Letters on the Impediments which obstruct the Trade and Commerce of the City and Port of Bristol* by Cosmo, Bristol, 1823.

[51] *Cosmo's Letters*, p. 57.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

At least one Merchant Venturer attempted to defend the Society in the press, but Cosmo swept aside his apologia.[54] To the argument that the Society had no funds available, Cosmo replied by asking what was happening to the profits from wharfage and cranage which the Society leased from the Corporation. The Society did not publicly account for the profits, so that Bristolians had no information about the amount of the profits or the extent to which they were spent on improving the harbour and quays. He questioned the legality of the duties and pointed out that Merchant Venturers were themselves exempt from the burdens imposed on others.[55] He remarked pointedly "your title would import, that you could and ought to effect all, that I trust the newly projected Chamber of Commerce will accomplish,"[56] and he concluded one of his letters with the words "To your Society, therefore, Gentlemen, I would say, PONDER THESE HINTS, AND BE WISE. . . . To my Fellow-citizens, I would add, AWAKE, ARISE, OR BE FOR EVER FALLEN."[57]

Largely as a result of Cosmo's biting criticisms of the establishment, there was formed at the end of 1822 the Bristol Chamber of Commerce to do the kind of work which Cosmo thought the Society ought to have been doing. Advertisements were inserted in the Bristol papers in December 1822 and a meeting to elect a provisional committee was held in the Commercial Rooms on 27 December. The appeal for membership on 1 January 1823 carried the signature of nearly 200 firms and individuals. The purpose was to protect the trade and commerce of Bristol by the same means as were used by similar institutions in other large cities and ports and to provide redress of grievances in case of public and private difficulties or hardships. Merchants, bankers, tradesmen and others were invited to join.[58]

The Chamber of Commerce in its early days cooperated with the

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[53] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[54] In the Bristol Record Office, there is a collection of the Letters of J. M. Gutch relating to the foundation of the Chamber of Commerce (Bristol Record Office: 13748(5)). The collection contains two letters from *Mercator* in defence of the Society. They are endorsed "James Whitchurch to Cosmo".

[55] *Cosmo's Letters*, pp. 65 ff.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[58] The first Minute Book of the Chamber of Commerce subsequently passed out of the hands of the Chamber but was eventually purchased by Mr. H. Meade-King and restored to the Chamber on 8 September 1966.

Society on a number of issues.[59] In view of the interest aroused by Cosmo's criticisms, the Chamber gave a great deal of attention to various local duties imposed in the port which were alleged to be damaging the trade of the city. On this question, the Society had a certain sympathy with it, but it had to be very careful. The Society held from the Corporation the wharfage dues and the cranage rights, and those who questioned the Corporation's title to the Mayor's Dues and the Town Dues might easily proceed to question the right to wharfage, which was a major item in the Society's income.

The Chamber of Commerce in September 1823 submitted to the Corporation and to the public a comparative study of the port charges at Bristol, London, Liverpool and Hull, which showed very clearly the high duties charged at Bristol. The Corporation took no action. The Chamber of Commerce pressed the issue, and in January 1824, the Corporation condemned it as "hasty, premature and animated by hostile feeling". The critics of the establishment then petitioned the House of Commons for an enquiry into the decay of the port.[60] The Corporation was evidently disturbed by the attack, and it referred the Memorial of the Chamber of Commerce to the Society. The Society set up a Committee on Local Taxation which obtained information from other ports and employed an accountant to prepare figures. The Committee's lengthy report was approved by a General Hall on 8 March 1824 at a meeting at which only 16 members were present and was then sent to the Corporation.[61]

The Report stated that the Committee was satisfied from the evidence it had collected that the Port of Bristol had suffered a comparative decline and that this decline was to be mainly attributed "to the Municipal Taxes on Goods and Shipping, denominated Town and Mayor's Dues". The situation was likely to get worse as internal communications improved. Exports from the adjacent counties, which should naturally go through Bristol, were going elsewhere. Even the staple commodities of the city were being sent coastwise to London and Liverpool. The Mayor's Dues and the Town Dues were objectionable in principle as no equivalent was received in return for payment. They were levied on "foreigners", that is non-freemen, even though they were resident in Bristol. The duties were charged on an *ad valorem* basis, whereas they ought to be levied per package and not according to the value of the goods. They must be materially reduced, and the Corporation should also examine other port charges, such as the fees and perquisites of the bailiff and quay wardens. It was essential that action should be taken in view of the progress of Newport, Chepstow and Cardiff. The Committee added, presumably with its tongue in its cheek, that although a reduction would affect the Corporation's income, it was sure that the councillors would have "too deep an interest in the general welfare of their native City, to allow any consideration of that nature to interfere with the adoption of any measure which may be found essentially necessary to the promotion of its Commercial Prosperity.[62]

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[59] *H.B.15*, p. 303, 14 March 1823; p. 311, 17 April 1823; p. 313, 6 May 1823; p. 321, 14 June 1823; p. 323, 17 June 1823. *Letter Book III 1816–1826*, pp. 279, 281 ff.

[60] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 103, 104; Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, Bristol, 1909, pp. 58 ff.

[61] *H.B.15*, p. 356, 2 Jan. 1824; p. 359, 6 Feb. 1824; p. 363, 5 March 1824; p. 367, 8 March 1824. For the Report, see *H.B.15*, pp. 394 ff.

At this point the Corporation was under fire both from the Chamber of Commerce and from the Society. It met the attack by introducing into the House of Commons a bill which would in effect confirm its questionable right to levy Town and Mayor's Dues and at the same time it undertook to reduce substantially the actual charges.[63] The Chamber of Commerce was uncompromisingly opposed to the bill and asked the Society for its views. The Society also found the bill objectionable, since it sanctioned by law dues which at present rested solely on prescription and it merely empowered, instead of requiring, the Corporation to make reductions. It suggested that there should be inserted in the bill a schedule of alterations and reductions, with rates which were not to be exceeded in future. It sent a copy of this proposal to the Chamber of Commerce with a request that it should not be made public.[64]

The Corporation resented the attitude of the Society, and on 17 March 1824 the Society assured the Corporation that it had never entertained the notion that it intended by the bill to get parliamentary confirmation of a dubious title, adding, one hopes sarcastically, "They are quite sure that the Common Council are incapable of being influenced by any such Motive." They thought, however, that the bill had this tendency.[65]

The Chamber of Commerce had no illusions about the motives of the Corporation and requested a conference with the Society. The Standing Committee declined a conference on the grounds "that the Interests of the Public would be best consulted by preserving the Proceedings of this Society upon all Questions arising out of the Bill distinct from those both of the Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce".[66] Although critical of the Corporation, the Society was not willing to join in an all-out attack and was in fact prepared to come to terms. On 9 April, the Hall decided to rely on the intentions of the Corporation to make considerable reductions and agreed to relinquish opposition, provided Common Council would agree to a package rate in all cases instead of *ad valorem* duties. It also recommended the Chamber of Commerce to abandon opposition, and it sent to Richard Hart Davis, M.P. a petition in favour of the bill.[67]

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[62] *H.B.15*, p. 398, 8 March 1824.

[63] *H.B.15*, p. 370, 12 March 1824; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 104.

[64] *H.B.15*, p. 371, 16 March 1824.

[65] *H.B.15*, p. 373, 17 March 1824.

[66] *H.B.15*, p. 375, 2 April 1824.

The Chamber of Commerce still objected, and it again asked for a conference with the Society.[68] It was extremely critical of the Merchant Venturers and accused them of abandoning their principles. With lofty dignity, the Standing Committee assured the Hall that "this is an assumption which . . . the Committee presume to think has been made without due reflection". It argued that in view of the concessions made by the Corporation, continued opposition would be very ungracious. It went on: "Persuaded that the Society will think a Document of this description, charging them with inconsistency, dereliction of Principles, hasty decisions, negligence and oversight ought, in justice to their own Character, to receive some Answer, the Committee direct that the foregoing Reply be entered upon their Journals in order that it may be read in the Hall this day, and if approved transmitted to the Chamber of Commerce."[69] The Report was duly adopted in a Hall at which 13 members were present, and a resolution was passed that the bill and the assurances given by the Corporation would be highly beneficial to the trade and commerce of Bristol.[70]

The Chamber of Commerce fought on without support from the Society. A subscription of £3,000 was raised to oppose the bill,[71] and in the face of such formidable opposition, the Corporation withdrew it.[72] In October, the Society assured the Corporation that "they place the firmest reliance on the favourable disposition which has been evinced by the Common Council to promote the Trade of the Port."[73]

The Corporation realised that it would have to make some concessions to its critics in Bristol. In November 1824, it informed the Hall that it still wished, under authority from Parliament, to reduce and modify the duties, "which relief they again state would have been voluntarily conceded to the Port if the interference of the Chamber of Commerce had not prevented it."[74] The Corporation clearly spoke with its tongue in its cheek. It is most unlikely that it would have taken any action at all but for the agitation of the Chamber of Commerce, and if its object was merely to modify the duties, it could have done so without parliamentary sanction. In

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[67] *H.B.15*, p. 379, 9 April 1824 (19 present), *Letter Book III 1816–1826*, p. 377, 19 April 1825.

[68] *H.B.15*, p. 384, 10 April 1824.

[69] *H.B.15*, p. 393, 1 May 1824.

[70] *H.B.15*, pp. 389, 390, 1 May 1824.

[71] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 104.

[72] *H.B.15*, p. 404, 4 June 1824.

[73] *H.B.15*, p. 421, 1 Oct. 1824.

[74] *H.B.16*, p. 3, 17 Nov. 1824.

February 1825 it informed the Society that it would relinquish the Town Dues on the Irish and the coasting trade and modify the rest. It submitted to the Society a new schedule replacing the *ad valorem* dues by duties on packages according to weight.[75] The Society suggested a long list of amendments,[76] most of which were accepted, expressed the hope that there would be further modifications, and then decided to support the Corporation's bill.[77] It petitioned the House of Commons saying that the bill would be of great benefit to the trade of the port.[78]

The Society was thus prepared to accept half a loaf from the Corporation, but there was great opposition to the bill from a large section of the community, Tories as well as Whigs, and a fierce conflict ensued in the House of Commons, in which the Chamber of Commerce played a major part. The Corporation was attacked as an irresponsible and self-elected body which gave no services in return for the duties it imposed and which published no accounts of the money it collected.[79] The Corporation retorted that the port dues were the personal property of the Corporation and that it was not accountable for them. The bill as finally passed did not give parliamentary sanction to the Corporation's claim to the duties. It reduced the charges, but they still remained much higher than in other ports.[80] The struggle continued under the leadership of the Chamber of Commerce, but the Society took no part.[81]

The conflict left a bitter taste in the mouths of many Bristolians, and when the Parliamentary Commissioners on the Excise visited the city in 1825, one of the Commissioners, Mr. Wallace, tried to settle the dispute between the Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce, which he thought was very injurious to trade. He suggested establishing "a Channel of free intercourse" between the Corporation, the Society and the Chamber by setting up a joint committee to restore harmony. The Society was willing to act jointly where necessary, but the Corporation could not forgive the Chamber and informed the Hall that "it cannot but anticipate insuperable difficulties in applying the Principle of negotiation and arrangement to the settlement of differences which wholly consist of hostile aggressions on the one hand upon the Revenue and constitutional government of the Corporation, and on the other of the necessary defence and maintenance of Rights established by the enjoyment and usage of Centuries".[82]

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[75] *H.B.16*, pp. 20, 21, 4 Feb. 1825.

[76] *H.B.16*, p. 35, 22 Feb. 1825 (16 present).

[77] *H.B.16*, p. 38, 11 March 1825.

[78] *Book of Petitions*, p. 175, 22 April 1825.

[79] To the collected edition of Cosmo's letters. J. M. Gutch added a long appendix giving "The Evidence, Speeches of Counsel and Proceedings in Parliament upon the Bristol Town and Mayor's Dues Bill'. See also Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 104 ff.

[80] The bill received the royal assent 6 July 1825. It is printed as an appendix to *Cosmo's Letters*.

[81] See Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 193 ff.

In this dispute the Society must have been uncomfortably aware that its own position was vulnerable if "Rights established by the enjoyment and usage of Centuries" were to be called in question.[83] It was inevitable that sooner or later the Chamber of Commerce should ask awkward questions about the wharfage dues, which were the Society's main source of income. In July 1826, it wrote to the Society arguing that the trade to Ireland ought not to be subject to these duties.[84] The Standing Committee disagreed with this view, and the Chamber of Commerce then suggested that the issue ought to be decided in a court. Meanwhile, their members would pay the dues conditionally in order to avoid "that feature of hostility", and the Hall agreed to this arrangement.[85] At the end of the year, the Chamber of Commerce informed the Society that it was ceasing to press its claim for discontinuance of wharfage and other duties on the Irish trade as a legal right, but suggested a reduction of the wharfage rates "as a measure of liberality and good policy" to promote the commercial interest of the city. The Society had no desire to reduce its own income, and the Standing Committee replied that it held the wharfage lease for a valuable consideration expended in erecting quays and wharfs and other public improvements from which the trade of the port greatly benefitted. It was not reasonable to ask it to reduce the duties without an equivalent return, and it thought the rates were on the whole reasonable.[86]

The situation became even more embarrassing in April 1827 when the Chamber of Commerce asked the Society to let it have details of gross receipts yearly since 1807 for wharfage, cranage, plankage, anchorage and moorage, with a particular account for each year of how the money had been used, "it being important that the Chamber should know of the extent of the expenditure by the Society during the period of twenty years in erecting and maintaining Quays and Wharfs within the Port as compared with the Monies received". A similar request was received by the Society from one of its own members, Samuel Harford, who stated that he believed he had the right to have the information and to impart it to the Chamber of Commerce of which he was a member. The Standing Committee replied by asking the Chamber of Commerce why it wanted the information and whether it intended to bring into discussion the title of the Society to the wharfage duties.[87] The Chamber answered that its object was to effect a revision and reduction of the wharfage rates and that it thought the dues should be used only for constructing and maintaining the wharfs and quays. Ominously, it said that it made the request "with the assurance that they would be understood as desirous of obtaining the Statement from the Society in Courtesy in preference to any other means that might be resorted to". Since the Society was annually making a considerable profit out of wharfage, it reacted strongly. Its generalised assertion that the proceeds of wharfage were used for the benefit of the port could not in fact stand up to detailed examination, and its best policy was a point blank refusal to give the required information. The Committee was "decidedly of the Opinion that the Society have no alternative but to resist *in limine* a Demand made upon them for a purpose so hostile to their Rights and Interests". Loftily it concluded that "without therefore entering into any formal refutation of the Principles advanced by the Chamber of Commerce in qualification of so extraordinary a Requisition, which however the Committee wholly deny, they deem it quite sufficient on the present occasion to recommend to the Society that a compliance with the application be refused".[88] It was hardly surprising that the Corporation showed its gratitude for the support it had earlier received by passing a resolution expressing "their approbation of the decisive conduct adopted by the Society.[89]

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[82] *H.B.16*, pp. 86, 87, 90, 9 Nov. 1825; pp. 110, 111, 4 Jan. 1826. For a detailed study of the Corporation in this period, see Graham Bush, "The Old and the New: The Corporation of Bristol 1820–1851', unpublished Bristol Ph.D. thesis, 1965.

[83] See *Cosmo's Letters*, pp. 65 ff., for his comments on the way in which the Society had by an act of 47 George III secured parliamentary confirmation of rights to wharfage, cranage, plankage, anchorage and moorage which hitherto had rested solely on prescription.

[84] *H.B.16*, pp. 136–7, 5 July 1826.

[85] *H.B.16*, p. 142, 19 July 1826; p. 145, 2 Aug. 1826; p. 150, 18 Aug. 1826; p. 155, 6 Sept. 1826.

[86] *H.B.16*, p. 180, 8 Dec. 1826.

The correspondence continued. The Chamber of Commerce denied that it was acting in a hostile manner. It had appealed to the Society to use its influence with the Corporation to get the rates reduced. It reminded the Hall that the Society had previously affirmed with reference to the Town Dues that "All taxes on Trade where Trade derives no remuneration" were in their nature injurious, and it assumed the Society had not gone back on its principles. The Society replied that the parallel was not correct. The wharfage dues were not charges for which no equivalent was rendered. They had been granted in return for the maintenance and repair of the quays as well as for their original construction. It was no answer to say that in the course of time "they had become more than an equivalent (supposing this to be the case) unless the opposite were conceded, that if they had fallen short, the Society would have been entitled to an augmentation". The Committee sharply reminded the Chamber that this was not the first time that it had used communications from the Merchant Venturers to make unwarranted assumptions, and it regretted that such behaviour tended to discourage unreserved freedom of intercourse. The demand was most extraordinary and there was no justification for it.[90]

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[87] *H.B.16*, p. 196, 6 April 1827.

[88] *H.B.16*, pp. 200, 202, 4 May 1827.

[89] *H.B.16*, p. 208, 27 June 1827.

The Chamber of Commerce was not easily discouraged. In September 1827 it repeated its arguments but waived for the present its request to see the wharfage accounts. It asked the Society to review the duties and reduce them so that the revenue was equal to the annual average expenditure on the port. The Committee again claimed that the duties had been leased to it in return for a valuable consideration and that the Chamber could not claim that they should be reduced when trade increased unless it would concede that they should be increased when trade declined. It endeavoured to conclude the correspondence by saying "As it must be evident that any longer protraction of a discussion, so conducted, can answer no useful purpose, the Committee have determined that their present Reply shall be as concise, as the occasion will admit, and they mean it to be final."[91] The Corporation again expressed its approval of the Society's action.[92]

The Chamber of Commerce made one last effort in December, but its resolutions were treated with contempt. The Hall Minutes record that when the document was read "The futility of its reasoning appeared to be so obvious on the face of it that the Committee were satisfied no Answer could have been necessary even if they had not been precluded by their last Resolution from any further Correspondence with the Chamber on the Subject."[93]

On the question of wharfage, the Society was extremely sensitive, and it was hardly surprising that it came in conflict with a Chamber of Commerce desperately anxious to reduce port dues. There were, however, other less controversial issues over which cooperation was possible. The Chamber was very much concerned to develop towing by steam in the river and harbour, and it pressed the Society to take action. In December 1824, when the Chamber asked for support, the Society sent it its resolution of 5 December 1823 asking the Havenmaster to look into the matter and to allow the owner of any small vessel to experiment if he did not think it would endanger navigation.[94] In 1826, the Chamber again raised the matter and was told that the Society's committee was favourably disposed, had obtained a number of opinions and had appointed a pilot experienced in steam packets.[95] In spite of these efforts, Bristol remained far behind other ports, and the first steam tug did not operate until 1836.[96]

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[90] *H.B.16*, p. 218, 6 July 1827.

[91] *H.B.16*, pp. 213 ff., 14 Sept. 1827.

[92] *H.B.16*, pp. 237, 238, 21 Sept. 1827.

[93] *H.B.16*, p. 255, 7 Dec. 1827.

[94] *H.B.16*, p. 6, 10 Dec. 1824; *H.B.15*, p. 355, 5 Dec. 1823.

In 1828, the Chamber of Commerce wrote to the Society about the possibility of getting the government to make Bristol into a steam packet station for Ireland and also enquired about the state of the fund, of which the Society was trustee, for making a bridge over the Avon. The Society did not show interest at this time in the first proposal, and with regard to the second, it referred the Chamber to the Report of the Charity Commissioners on William Vick's donation.[97] The Chamber pressed both issues again in 1829 and gave the Hall information about its correspondence with the Treasury and the Postmaster General concerning the proposed Mail Steam Packets. It suggested that a joint committee of the Corporation, the Merchant Venturers and the Chamber of Commerce should be set up to consider the practicability of the improvements the government could require if a Packet Station was to be established. The Society's reply was not encouraging. It pointed out that, like the Chamber of Commerce, it had also taken up the matter with the Treasury and the Postmaster General, that the government would require a pier at Portishead or some other spot to ensure that the arrival and departure of the mails did not depend upon the state of the tides, that this would be costly and was not likely to yield returns which would make it possible to do it by subscription. However, if other bodies were interested in setting up a joint committee, the Society would cooperate.[98] There the matter rested.

The Chamber of Commerce was more successful in its attempt to get action about a bridge over the Avon. As early as 1823, Cosmo had been very critical about the lack of publicity concerning Vick's fund and suggested that if the money in the fund was still insufficient the Society ought to ask for additional subscriptions, which would be forthcoming, and there could then begin "one of those bold and animating schemes of improvement which would have given a spur and activity to the present paralized and torpid energies of the Citizens of Bristol".[99] In 1829, under pressure from the Chamber, the Society took some action. It pointed out that the Fund would not amount to £10,000 until 1834 and that this would not be enough for the project, but it undertook to get estimates and prepare schemes.[100] A committee was set up to prepare a bill, and the Mayor, the Governor of St. Peter's Hospital and the President of the Chamber of Commerce were asked to join it. The Society thought that the scheme should be carried through by Commissioners rather than by a joint stock company. Early in 1830, the Society petitioned parliament and obtained an Act, but for various reasons the scheme came to nothing at this time.[101]

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[95] *H.B.16*, pp. 120, 121, 22 March 1826; p. 123, 7 April 1826; p. 129, 3 May 1826.

[96] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 76 ff.

[97] *H.B.16*, pp. 286, 287, 15 Aug. 1828; *Letter Book IV 1826–1833*, p. 127, 19 June 1828. For Vick's charity, see pp. 115, 245, 434, 542.

[98] *H.B.16*, p. 334, 14 Aug. 1829; p. 337, 28 Aug. 1829.

[99] *Cosmo's Letters*, p. 59.

There seems to have been only occasional contact between the Society and the Chamber of Commerce in the eighteen-thirties. In 1833 the Chamber asked the Society to support its Memorial to the Docks Company requesting a reduction of the rates charged. The Society referred the request to a committee, but took no further action.[102] In 1836, the Chamber drew the Society's attention to the dangers of "contention amongst the Captains and Owners of steamers employed in towing" arising from lack of regulation. The Society thought this was a matter for the Corporation.[103] In the same year, the Society, the Chamber of Commerce and the Great Western Steamship Company were all represented on a committee set up by the Town Council to consider the needs of the port and the reconstruction of the Docks Company. The Report it produced has been described by one historian of the port as "more like a financial fantasy than the recommendation of a body of men with any sense of realism".[104]

In the eighteen-forties there was a growing demand that the Corporation should take over the Docks Company, and in 1846 there was formed a Free Port Association into which the Chamber of Commerce appears to have been absorbed.[105] The Free Port Association achieved its objectives in 1848. In 1851 Robert Bright, who had been Chairman of the Free Port Association, sent to the Society a Memorandum from a large body of merchants, bankers and traders asking it to cooperate in re-establishing a Chamber of Commerce.[106] The Memorial proposed a very close relationship between the two bodies. The Society was not willing to surrender any of its independence or to resume the role which it had played in earlier periods as a major champion of the commercial interests of Bristol. It welcomed the establishment of a new Chamber as being highly beneficial to the mercantile interests of the city, but was of the opinion that "the permanence and utility of such a body would be better insured by its entire independence of the Society. . . ." If there were enough subscribers, the Society would contribute up to £100 a year.[107] This was perhaps a formal recognition of what had long been the reality, that the Society was no longer greatly interested in the objects for which it had originally been constituted and that it was finding its raison d'être in other activities.

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[100] *H.B.16*, p. 334, 14 Aug. 1829; p. 337, 28 Aug. 1829.

[101] *H.B.16*, p. 342, 11 Sept. 1829; pp. 347, 348, 11 Sept. 1829; p. 372, 1 Feb. 1830.

[102] *H.B.17*, p. 180, 8 Nov. 1833. In 1834, the Chamber did in fact succeed in getting the Docks Company to reduce the charges. (Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, Bristol, 1909, p. 65.)

[103] *H.B.17*, p. 379, 9 March 1836.

[104] W. G. Neale, *At the Port of Bristol*, vol. 1, Bristol, 1968, p. 6. Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, pp. 69 ff.

[105] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 300. The Bristol Chamber of Commerce still awaits its historian.

[106] *H.B.21*, p. 105, 10 Jan. 1851.

Robert Bright regretted that the Society was unwilling to take a prominent part in the constitution of the new Chamber of Commerce, but managed to get it to agree to the Master being *ex officio* President and the Wardens being two of the Vice-Presidents.[108] Even this tenuous link was broken in 1857 when the Hall voted against renewing its annual subscription on the grounds that the Chamber in communicating with one of the M.P.s had made use of "language offensive to the Society of Merchant Venturers". I. W. Rankin, Chairman of the Committee of the Chamber, assured the Hall that the Chamber would not have intentionally spoken disrespectfully of the Society, and the Hall responded by renewing its annual subscription but decided that the Master and Wardens should not in future be *ex officio* President and Vice-Presidents of the Chamber.[109] Although the Chamber pressed the Society to think again and at least to have some Merchant Venturers on its Committee, the Hall decided that it was undesirable to be connected in any more intimate manner.[110]

In the later eighteen-fifties and early eighteen-sixties the two organisations occasionally cooperated on matters of mutual interest. In 1858, for example, the Chamber of Commerce sent a deputation to ask the Merchant Venturers to appoint a committee to confer with the Mayor, the Docks Committee and the Chamber of Commerce concerning provision for larger steamships at the mouth of the Avon. A committee was appointed, and the parties met at the Docks Office. The Hall Minutes record laconically "No-one had a plan." A resolution was passed to the effect that the mouth of the Avon ought to be made suitable for this purpose and that a sub-committee should consider the best method, but the Master and all except one of the Docks Committee declined to vote.[111]

In 1859, the Chamber of Commerce enquired whether the Society would cooperate with it and the Docks Committee in an attempt to get Lundy made a Harbour of Refuge. The Master said that no doubt the Society would do so as it had first put forward the proposal itself, and a resolution was passed stating that although the Society regretted that the Chamber had acted in opposition to it by advocating Clovelly rather than Lundy, it was glad the Chamber now shared its views and that it would cooperate.[112]

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[107] *H.B.21*, p. 117, 1 March 1851.
[108] *H.B.21*, p. 146, 20 June 1851.
[109] *H.B.22*, p. 124, 28 Jan. 1857; p. 133, 21 Feb. 1857.
[110] *H.B.22*, p. 164, 24 June 1857; p. 177, 14 Aug. 1857; p. 187, 11 Sept. 1857.
[111] *H.B.22*, p. 227, 12 Feb. 1855; p. 235, 12 March 1858.

Next year, the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce offered to support the Society in opposing a bill to alter the pilotage system, and the offer was accepted.[113] Three years later, the Master, Wardens and others went on a joint depuation with the Chamber of Commerce to the Postmaster General to press for favourable consideration for Bristol as a port of departure for the West India Mails.[114] After that, there was little contact between the two bodies since the Society had for the most part withdrawn completely from involvement in matters which were of concern to the Chamber of Commerce.

[112] *H.B.22*, p. 343, 8 April 1859.
[113] *H.B.23*, p. 82, 13 Dec. 1860.
[114] *H.B.23*, p. 356, 8 April 1864.

CHAPTER 18

The Port, the River and the Sea in the Nineteenth Century

THE DOCKS

THE proposal to make a Floating Harbour which had been under consideration by a joint committee of the Corporation and the Society[1] came alive again in the early nineteenth century. In July 1800, while the war with France was still going on, the Hall looked again at its resolution of 1791 and asked the Standing Committee to confer with the Corporation with a view to expediting the business.[2] The Corporation continued to drag its feet, and a year later the Society asked the Mayor why no action had been taken.[3] The joint committee eventually prepared a report which was considered by the Society on 11 March 1802.[4] Considerable modifications were made in the months that followed, and what eventually emerged in the face of strong opposition was an Act for improving and rendering more commodious the Port and Harbour of Bristol.[5] Although the bulk of the capital came from subscriptions, part of it was raised by a mortgage. The proposal that the Corporation and the Society should guarantee the interest on the mortgage was dropped during the passage of the bill through the Lords and, instead, a rate was laid on houses and land in the city.[6] The rights of the Corporation and the Society to collect their various dues in the port were left untouched, and the scheme thus involved the two corporations in no risk whatever. Nevertheless, the Board of Directors established by the Act consisted of 9 members of the Corporation, including the Mayor, 9 members of the Society of Merchant Venturers, including the Master, and 9 members elected by the shareholders. Of the 242 original subscribers, nearly 50 were

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[1] See p. 159.

[2] *H.B.13*, p. 149, 29 July 1800 (11 members present).

[3] *H.B.13*, p. 180, 7 July 1801.

[4] *H.B.13*, pp. 196 ff., 11 March 1802.

[5] 43 George III c. 140. For details concerning the Floating Harbour, see R. A. Buchanan, "The Construction of the Floating Harbour in Bristol: 1804–1809", *Trans. B. G. Arch. Soc.*, lxxxviii, 1969; W. G. Neale, *At the Port of Bristol*, vol. 1. 1968; Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, 1909. See also *H.B.13*, p. 220, 25 Aug. 1802 (12 present); pp. 241 ff., 8 Feb. 1803 (12 present).

[6] W. G. Neale, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 8.

Merchant Venturers, as were 5 of the 9 directors elected by the main body of the shareholders.[7]

The subsequent history of the new Docks Company up to 1848 when it was taken over by the Corporation need not concern us here, but it must be noted that the Society had in some degree a vested interest in it through its *ex officio* members and was therefore not inclined to play a leading part in the movement led by the Chamber of Commerce and the Free Port Association for the taking over of the Docks by the Corporation.[8] Moreover, it was extremely anxious to retain its wharfage lease, even though the establishment of a Docks Company naturally raised the question of why the Society should continue to collect port dues.[9] When the Free Port movement was successful in 1848 and the Corporation took over the docks, the Society still retained its wharfage lease.

During the period when the Society was so well represented on the board of the Bristol Dock Company, it did not show any enthusiasm for schemes which might interfere with the prosperity of the city docks. In 1841 it joined the Corporation in opposing the Pill Dock bill,[10] and in 1846, together with the Corporation, it offered "strenuous opposition" to a bill to make a pier at Portbury and a railway from there to Bristol, on the grounds that it would obstruct navigation, put tolls on vessels in Portishead roadstead and injure the trade of Bristol.[11]

After the city docks had been taken over by the Corporation, the Society showed much greater interest in schemes for developing new docks down the river which might overcome some of the disadvantages of the city docks. As has already been noted, the Society had cooperated with the Chamber of Commerce and the Corporation in 1858 to consider the possibility of providing for larger steamers at the mouth of the Avon.[12] Nothing came of this, but in 1861 the Bristol Port Railway and Pier Company was formed with a view to developing Avonmouth. Three Merchant Venturers were members of the provisional committee.[13] In February 1862, the promoters explained their plans to the Standing Committee and informed it that the railway would not interfere with the Society's quarries, and in August the Society agreed to subscribe £1,000 provided it could be recovered in cash from the compensation due from the Company in respect of the Society's property.[14] The Act went through in 1862, and with compensation received for 5 acres of land the Society subscribed £1,000 to the Company.[15] The line to Avonmouth was opened in March 1864 and the pier was completed about three months later.[16] The development of a line from Avonmouth to Bristol was obviously related to the possibility of constructing a dock there, and even before the railway began, a number of people associated with it, including two Merchant Venturers, P. W. S. Miles and Robert Bright, formed in 1862 the Bristol Port and Channel Dock Company for that purpose. There was fierce controversy about this threat to the city docks, but eventually the bill went through in 1864 with the support of the Corporation and the Society.[17]

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[7] The list of subscribers named in the Act of 1803 is printed in Wells, *op. cit.*, pp. 42 ff. The 9 directors elected by the shareholders are listed in Wells, p. 46.

[8] See p. 304.

[9] For the wharfage lease, see pp. 310–13.

[10] *H.B.19*, pp. 105, 107–8, 10 May 1841. The Society claimed that proposal to convert Pill into a public creek was put forward by "a private Company . . . for their own individual benefit". As a result of opposition, the bill was withdrawn (*H.B.19*, p. 109, 22 May 1841).

[11] *H.B.20*, p. 217, 16 April 1846; p. 218, 21 April 1846; p. 219, 23 April 1846; pp. 220–1, 25 April 1846; p. 222, 1 May 1846; p. 228, 13 May 1846.

[12] See p. 305; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 249.

[13] P. W. S. Miles, who was also President of the Chamber of Commerce, F. W. Green, Master of the Society, and Robert Bright. See also Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 251 ff.

The Avonmouth scheme, however, had a rival in the Portishead Pier and Railway Company which had obtained an Act in 1863. One of its promoters was Alderman Richard Robinson, who had been Master of the Merchant Venturers in 1846–7 and who was strongly opposed to the Avonmouth dock. There was thus some division within the Society. When in 1868 Mr. Averay Jones and Mr. Thomas Terrett Taylor successfully carried a proposal that the Society should invest £2,500 in the Avonmouth scheme on the grounds that it was of vital importance to the future of Bristol,[18] Mr. Robinson proposed that a similar amount should be invested in the Portishead scheme, and this was eventually agreed.[19] The Society thus made relatively modest investments in both schemes, the merits of which were dividing Bristolians. Avonmouth Dock was opened in 1877 and Portishead in 1879.

Although the Society as a corporate body ceased to be directly involved in control of the docks when the Corporation took over from the Docks Company in 1848, individual members continued to play a very important part in running the docks and shaping policy as members of the City Council and of the City Docks Committee. The first chairman of the Docks Committee was Richard Jenkins Poole King who held office from 1848 to 1859 and who was Master in 1851–2. One of the most forceful and controversial members of the Committee was William Proctor Baker, Master 1869–70, and Chairman of the Docks Committee from 1880 to 1882 and again from 1893 to 1899. Edward Burrow Hill, Master 1894–5, was Deputy Chairman from 1893 to 1897. Of the 108 members of the Docks Committee between 1848 and 1899, 18 were elected Master of the Merchant Venturers, 3 had been Master before 1848 and 1 had been a Warden.[20] Thus a number of Merchant Venturers were deeply involved in the controversial issues about the docks which led to such fierce conflict in Bristol in the second half of the nineteenth century, but the Society as a corporate body was, perhaps fortunately, not directly concerned.

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[14] *H.B.23*, p. 196, 20 Feb. 1862; p. 228, Aug. 1862.

[15] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 251.

[16] Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, p. 165.

[17] *H.B.23*, pp. 366 ff.; Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 183; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 251 ff.

[18] *H.B.24*, p. 259, 13 June 1868; p. 261, 17 July 1868; p. 264, 18 July 1868; pp. 269–70, 31 July 1868.

[19] *H.B.24*, p. 271, 31 July 1868; p. 285, 16 Oct. 1868; p. 288, 31 Oct. 1868.

THE WHARFAGE LEASE

The wharfage lease which had been granted by the Corporation to the Society in 1764 for 99 years provided a major source of income.[21] The legality of the dues was not without question, and in 1807 the Society, with the support of the Corporation, obtained an Act of Parliament confirming its claim. The Act made the duties chargeable on any wharf or quay within the port and extended considerably the Corporation's control over pilotage. It has been described as an example of the extraordinary effrontery with which select and closed corporations sought legal sanction for an extension of their very doubtful powers and as "an elaborate piece of legal chicanery".[22] It was later alleged that the bill had been pushed through in a hurry while the attention of many people in Bristol was still focussed on the Dock Act and that clauses favourable to the Society and the Corporation had been inserted during its passage through Parliament.[23] The Society had successfully achieved what the Corporation later attempted to do unsuccessfully with the Town and Mayor's Dues, that is, obtain parliamentary sanction for duties which had hitherto rested only on prescription.[24]

[20] See the biographies in W. G. Neale, *At the Port of Bristol* vol. 1 Bristol, 1968.

[21] See p. 152.

[22] 47 George III Sess. 2, cap. 33, "An Act for ascertaining and establishing the rates of wharfage, cranage, plankage, anchorage and moorage to be received at the lawful quays in the Port of Bristol; for the better regulation of pilots and pilotage of vessels navigating the Bristol Channel." *H.B.13*, p. 427, Jan. 1807; p. 433, 21 Feb. 1807; p. 454, 13 June 1807. A. J. Pugsley, "Some contributions towards a study of the economic development of Bristol in the 18th and 19th Centuries", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis, 1921.

[23] See *Letters on the Impediments which obstruct the Trade and Commerce of the City and Port of Bristol* by Cosmo, Bristol, 1823, pp. 65 ff. for some hard-hitting criticisms; *Report from the Commissioners on Municipal Corporation in England and Wales 1835*: Bristol, pp. 62 ff.

[24] See p. 297.

The Society continued to appoint a Collector or Receiver of wharfage[25] and to press its right to the dues in the face of opposition. In 1811 and 1812, for example, it complained that Customs Officers were not insisting on seeing receipts for the payment of wharfage before they cleared goods,[26] and it tried to prevent evasion by small craft discharging goods on private quays.[27] It even claimed that wharfage was due when goods were shipped from one vessel to another, but after getting counsel's opinion, it decided not to press the issue.[28] It resisted the claim of the Chamber of Commerce that ships in the Irish trade were not liable, and it refused a request that the accounts should be produced.[29]

The criticisms made by the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations in 1835 and the reform of the Corporation in the same year made it inevitable that the wharfage lease would come under increasingly critical examination in the years that followed, particularly when there was a movement led by the Chamber of Commerce to reduce the charges in the port. In 1836 the Town Council set up a committee to confer with the Society with a view to relieving the burdens on trade and instructed its Finance Committee to examine the circumstances in which the grant had been made.[30] It also began to look at the state of repair of the premises granted under the lease.[31] The Society professed its willingness to cooperate, provided the validity of the lease was not questioned.[32] As a gesture, it reduced the wharfage duty on tea.[33] Discussions dragged on. In 1839 a deputation from the Hall conferred with the Town Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the Great Western Steamship Company about the port charges. The joint committee reported in favour of the purchase of the docks by the Corporation and enquired whether in that case the Society would surrender its wharfage lease. The Society expressed its willingness to cooperate in any plan to reduce taxation in so far as funds were available.[34]

Nothing further was done, but the Society was aware that its wharfage lease was not likely to be renewed and was reluctant to spend money on port facilities. In 1841, it claimed that it had spent many thousands of pounds in improving the port in recent years by removing the Round Point and by other improvements and that it was unable to provide more sheds on the quays since the wharfage lease was drawing to a close. In fact, the lease was not due to end until 1863, but the Society evidently wished to keep down its expenditure.[35] The Society was also reluctant to provide planks, arguing that their provision was attached to the cranage lease, which had been surrendered in 1837, and not to the wharfage lease, but on this issue it came to an agreement to pay a certain sum annually to the Corporation.[36]

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[25] *H.B.14*, pp. 51 ff., 28 March 1809, Joseph Smith appointed. He was also Collector of the Town Dues. When he died, Charles Anderson was appointed (*H.B.14*, p. 335, 30 March 1815). On his death, Stephen Henley Stedder was appointed (*H.B.17*, p. 362, 25 Jan. 1836; p. 382, 20 April 1836).

[26] *H.B.14*, p. 180, 24 Dec. 1811; p. 184, 4 Feb. 1812.

[27] *H.B.15*, p. 202, 5 Dec. 1821.

[28] *H.B.15*, p. 303, 14 March 1823.

[29] See pp. 300–1.

[30] *H.B.17*, p. 392, 11 May 1836; p. 396, 8 June 1836.

[31] *H.B.17*, p. 483, 12 Oct. 1836.

[32] *H.B.18*, p. 5, 9 Dec. 1836; p. 19, 10 Feb. 1837.

[33] *H.B.18*, p. 7, 9 Dec. 1836.

[34] *H.B.18*, p. 389, 8 Nov. 1839.

When the Free Port Movement achieved its objective in 1848 and the Corporation took over the docks from the Docks Company, the newly established City Docks Committee pressed for a reduction in the wharfage rates, and the Society agreed to give up the duty on the Irish trade and to reduce duties on other goods by 10 per cent.[37]

After the Corporation had acquired the docks, the wharfage lease became even more anomalous, but the Society was extremely reluctant to give it up. When a bill on Local Dues on shipping was introduced in parliament in 1856, the Hall observed that the result would be to confiscate the Society's interest under the wharfage lease and that it was "imperatively incumbent" to protect itself from "such an unjust and oppressive proceeding". The Chamber of Commerce was informed that if the bill went through, the Society would be under the painful necessity of discontinuing its subscription.[38]

At the end of 1858, the Docks Committee pressed for negotiations to end the lease, and a deputation led by the Mayor suggested that in view of the lack of proper shed accommodation in the port and the recent defalcation by one of the clerks of the Collector of Wharfage, it would be best for the trade of the port if the Society surrendered the unexpired portion of the lease.[39] The Standing Committee recommended that the Hall should not negotiate but should instead offer to consider any plans put forward by the Corporation for providing more sheds.[40] The Docks Committee then got estimates amounting to £4,650 for the 14 sheds required. The Hall agreed to pay £500 a year while its lease lasted, provided that this did not amount to more than half the cost and provided that there was no question of terminating the lease.[41]

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[35] *H.B.19*, p. 144, 10 Sept. 1841.

[36] *H.B.19*, p. 243, 13 May 1842; pp. 275–7, 9 Sept. 1842.

[37] *H.B.20*, p. 395, 21 July 1848; p. 397, 28 July 1848.

[38] *H.B.22*, p. 32, 15 Feb. 1856; p. 35, 16 Feb. 1856.

[39] *H.B.22*, p. 293, 3 Dec. 1858. For the defalcation by one of the clerks of the Collector, S. H. Stedder, see *H.B.22*, p. 274, 10 Sept. 1858 and *H.B.23*, p. 87, 11 Jan. 1861. The defalcation over a ten year period amounted to £217 15s. 1d.

[40] *H.B.22*, p. 295, 10 Dec. 1858; p. 303, 21 Jan. 1859; p. 304, 26 Jan. 1859.

[41] *H.B.22*, pp. 434, 436, 9 March 1860.

At the beginning of 1861 when there was only two years to run on the lease, the Hall resolved that it would surrender it on fair terms, provided the Town Council did not press for dilapidations under the lease. It agreed to surrender the lease from 1 July 1861 on condition that it was paid annually for three years an amount equal to one third of the total receipts for the three years ending 31 March 1861. Out of this sum it agreed to make a free gift of £2,000 for the construction of sheds.[42] Thus in 1861 there was finally terminated a grant which the Society had first received from the Corporation in the early seventeenth century and which had been a major factor in linking the Society with the port. During the period of over 250 years during which it received the duties, the Society had rendered considerable services, but, particularly in the later stages, the arrangement had to a large extent ceased to serve its original purpose. The Society was making a considerable profit and was subject to a good deal of criticism. It is surprising that it was allowed to retain the lease for so long.

THE PILOTS

Although the Society was undoubtedly making a considerable profit out of the wharfage lease, it must in fairness be remembered that it was rendering other services to the mercantile community for which it did not receive a return. One of these was control of the pilots. In 1806 the Corporation assured the Society that the work of recommending and regulating the pilots could not be placed in fitter hands,[43] and the Merchant Venturers continued to exercise this delegated authority until 1861. From time to time the Hall drew up regulations and submitted them for approval to the Corporation,[44] and it also made recommendations about rates of pay.[45] Its work was considerably increased by an Act of 1807 which placed the whole of the pilotage in the Bristol Channel from Barnstable to Gloucester under the control of the Corporation and, in effect, under the Merchant Venturers.[46] The number of pilots increased considerably in the next fifty years. In 1826, for example, there were only 20, but when the Society made its inspection in 1858, the total was 76 and they had 40 apprentices.[47]

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[42] *H.B.23*, p. 106, 25 Feb. 1861; p. 109, 26 Feb. 1861; p. 113, 13 March 1861; pp. 118, 121, 3 April 1861.

[43] *H.B.13*, pp. 366, 367, 7 Jan. 1806.

[44] *H.B.14*, p. 25, 21 June 1805; pp. 66 ff., 28 June 1809; p. 91, 15 Nov. 1809; p. 315, 8 Nov. 1814; *H.B.20*, p. 70, 22 Nov. 1844.

[45] *H.B.14*, p. 55, 8 June 1809; pp. 66 ff., 28 June 1809; p. 238, 15 March 1813; *H.B.18*, p. 178, 25 April 1838; *H.B.20*, p. 70, 22 Nov. 1844. In 1824, the Society received a printed copy concerning "A Friendly Society of Licensed Pilots". It found it in some respects objectionable and referred it to the Corporation (*H.B.15*, p. 360, 6 Feb. 1824.

[46] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 254. In 1812, the Society appointed a pilot at Appledore and received a counter-petition from a man already operating there (*H.B.14*, p. 225, 30 Dec. 1812). In 1813, it appointed a pilot for Barnstable and

The Standing Committee, with the help of the Havenmaster, acted as an examining body and made recommendations for appointment to the Corporation.[48] Some effort was made to raise standards. In 1808, for example, the Society urged on the Corporation the need for higher rates in order to attract good men,[49] and in 1821 the Corporation itself suggested that no one should be a pilot unless he had been apprenticed to a branch pilot and sailed to a foreign port.[50] The pilots were reluctant to retire, and in 1820 in a Memorial to the Corporation the Hall pointed out that no new men had been appointed since 1800 and that five of the pilots seemed to be wholly incapable owing to age and infirmity. They should be superannuated and some financial provision made for them. The trade would attract able men if there was provision for pensions.[51]

The pilots were not easy men to control, and disciplinary action was frequently necessary, as well as the holding of courts of inquiry when ships were endangered or lost while a pilot was in charge. There are many cases of such action recorded in the Hall Books.[52] Abusive language was common, and there were numerous cases of drunkenness and inefficiency.[53] Pilots found guilty of misconduct or inefficiency were normally suspended, and occasionally their licences were withdrawn altogether. When the new S.S. *Demerara*, 3,000 tons, was wrecked in the Avon in 1851, the Pilotage Committee held an enquiry lasting two days and found the pilot, John Percival, had committed an error of judgement in taking her down the river at too rapid a rate. He was suspended for six months.[54] In 1856 a pilot who was charged with leaving the *Eliza* in a dangerous position near Portishead was suspended for a month after which he was to be subjected to a rigorous examination for competence.[55] When the American ship *Garrick* was lost at Port Kerry Bay in December 1857,

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Bideford and then decided the trade would take two men (*H.B.14*, p. 230, 4 Feb. 1813; p. 235, 11 Feb. 1813).

[47] *H.B.16*, p. 160, 22 Sept. 1826; *H.B.22*, p. 264, 18 June 1858.

[48] See, for example, *H.B.14*, p. 309, 23 Aug. 1814; *H.B.15*, p. 178, 25 Sept. 1821; *H.B.21*, p. 7, 8 June 1849, and many other references in the *Hall Books*.

[49] *H.B.14*, p. 66, 28 June 1808.

[50] *H.B.15*, p. 130, 2 Jan. 1821.

[51] *Book of Petitions*, p. 158, 2 Dec. 1820.

[52] See also *Sub-Committee Book 1842–1846*, and *Pilotage Committee Book 1846–1858*.

[53] See, for example, *H.B.14*, p. 278, 18 Nov. 1813; p. 326, 15 Nov. 1815; p. 394, 2 July 1816; *H.B.15*, p. 14, 17 Aug. 1819; p. 105, 13 Oct. 1820, *H.B.16*, p. 55, 13 May 1825; *H.B.21*, p. 43, 7 Feb. 1850.

[54] *H.B.21*, p. 204, 12 Dec. 1851. For an account of this disaster, see Charles Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol*, p. 103.

[55] *H.B.22*, p. 95, 4 Nov. 1856.

the Committee reported that the pilot had shown lamentable lack of judgement, had failed to take reasonable precautions and had not told the truth. It recommended that his licence be withdrawn.[56] At the other end of the scale were minor offences like stealing eggs from Lundy Island. When the indignant owner complained and gave the numbers of two of the pilots' skiffs, the Master warned the pilots that if the charges were pressed, they would be suspended.[57]

The Society's general responsibility for the pilots involved it in a number of other problems. In wartime, efforts had to be made to protect pilots against impressment.[58] In 1812, the towboatmen at Pill went on strike and interfered with the branch pilots, and the Society had to intervene.[59] In 1819, when the pilots complained that their yawls were being seized because they were not licensed in accordance with an Act 28 George II c. 28, the Clerk was instructed to look into the matter and to make special arrangements with the Commissioners of Customs.[60] The Hall also made charitable gifts to pilots and their dependents when they met with disaster. Thus, 15 guineas was given in 1810 to the widow of a pilot lost in a gale, £10 to a pilot who lost his skiff in 1836, and in 1843 the pension of an 81 year old pilot was increased from £10 to £20.[61] In 1859, after receiving a Memorial from the pilots, the Society decided to urge the Corporation to put £100 into a distress fund and to provide the same amount itself, but in future no relief was to be given to any one who lost a skiff which was not insured.[62]

Pilotage was compulsory, and some masters and owners were reluctant to accept it, Thus, in 1828 the pilots complained against the captains of two American vessels at Newport who refused to take on pilots. The local magistrates said it was none of their business, and the Society decided that actions would have to be brought against the captains in the name of Bristol Corporation.[63] In 1838, two pilots were forcibly turned off two French vessels, *Jean Baptiste* and *Marie Celeste*, after they had taken charge, the masters deciding not to pay pilotage. The Standing Committee was of opinion that new bye-laws were necessary to stop evasion, and that those who refused to pay should be informed that the matter would be referred to the Corporation.[64] In 1844, the Havenmaster reported evasion of pilotage by vessels going to Newport and Cardiff which pretended to be coasters, and the Clerk was instructed to get counsel's opinion.[65]

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[56] *H.B.22*, p. 126, 28 Jan. 1857.

[57] *H.B.22*, p. 171, 8 July 1857.

[58] *H.B.14*, p. 223, 14 Nov. 1812.

[59] See pp. 319–20.

[60] *H.B.15*, p. 3, 3 June 1819; p. 5, 4 June 1819.

[61] *H.B.14*, p. 118, 11 July 1810; *H.B.17*, p. 387, 20 April 1836; *H.B.19*, p. 345, 26 May 1843. There are a number of other examples in the *Hall Books*.

[62] *H.B.22*, p. 411, 8 Dec. 1859.

[63] *H.B.16*, p. 292, 3 Oct. 1828; p. 309, 5 Dec. 1828; p. 310, 2 Jan. 1829.

[64] *H.B.18*, p. 192, 13 June 1838; p. 252, 26 Oct. 1838.

The Society's management of the pilots was the subject of criticism in one of Cosmo's Letters. He asked "Where is the monument, the inscription, or record of your fame? It is in the nest of Pirates, I had almost called them, instead of Pilots, which navigates our rivers? Where is the reformation to be seen, which you have effected in the behaviour of this lawless, profligate race of our fellow subjects? Have you evinced any public spirit in proposing, or have you yet even designed to think of establishing steam vessels for towing our ships up and down the Avon and the Channel, instead of perpetuating the original sin of licensing more Pill Pilots? Look at the Clyde and the Mersey! Are the Merchants of Glasgow and Liverpool left at the mercy of such a set of extortioners. . . .?"[66] It is difficult to say how far this outburst was justifiable, but there is certainly no doubt that Bristol lagged far behind other ports in introducing steam pilotage.[67]

The Society did in fact contemplate giving up control of pilotage in June 1839 when it pointed out that many expenses in connection with the river and the pilots were borne gratuitously by the Society. It instructed a committee to consider whether they should be continued.[68] However, it was not until September 1840 that the Standing Committee recommended that the Society should give up pilotage and cease to pay all gratuitous expenses in connection with the river from 10 November. The arrangements concerning pilots were to end as soon as it suited the convenience of the Corporation.[69] This was confirmed by a General Hall, at which 13 members were present, on 30 September 1840.[70] It seems likely that the Hall was not so much anxious to get rid of pilotage as to reduce its expenses now that it was faced with a costly lawsuit over the Manor of Stogursey.[71] In the negotiations that followed, the Town Council argued that a number of the services which the Society claimed were given gratuitously were in fact obligatory under the wharfage lease, and it asked the Society to continue to manage the pilots in view of "the experience and mercantile knowledge which the leading Members are well known to possess".[72] It seems likely that when the Society realised that it would not get rid of its obligations concerning the river, even if it gave up pilotage, it decided to continue as before.

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[65] *H.B.19*, p. 425, 8 March 1844; p. 431, 30 March 1844.

[66] *Letters of Cosmo*, Bristol, 1823, p. 62.

[67] See pp. 302–3.

[68] *H.B.18*, p. 332, 5 June 1839.

[69] *H.B.19*, p. 28, 11 Sept. 1840.

[70] *H.B.19*, p. 31, 30 Sept. 1840.

[71] See pp. 365–70.

[72] *H.B.19*, p. 58, 27 Nov. 1840; p. 67, 11 Dec. 1840; p. 83 and pp. 93–5, 19 Feb. 1841.

The extensive jurisdiction exercised by the Society over pilots in the Bristol Channel was bound to be threatened as other ports grew in importance, and the Society had to take steps to defend its rights. In 1830, a clause in a bill to make a ship canal at Cardiff gave the Marquis of Bute, with the sanction of Cardiff, the right to licence Cardiff pilots. The Society found this highly objectionable and the clauses concerning pilots were dropped as a result of its protest.[73] There were similar protests in 1834 about bills concerning Newport and Aberavon.[74] The government itself was beginning to enquire into pilotage in this year and the Society had to answer a number of questions put by the Privy Council. The possibility of detaching the pilots of other ports from the authority of Bristol was being increasingly canvassed in the following years.[75] Newport in 1836 tried to get the right to appoint its own pilots, and the Corporation of Bristol sought to ward off the threat by agreeing to appoint two or more Bristol pilots to reside at or near Newport.[76] Pressure for more pilots continued to build up from other Bristol Channel ports.[77]

The possibility of government interferences increased in the eighteen-fifties. In 1854, at the request of the Bristol Docks Committee, the Society joined a deputation to the Board of Trade, and later in the year it gave evidence before the Marine Department of the Board. The Privy Council expressed the opinion that there should be only one authority for the Bristol Channel and that this should be either the Board of Trade, Trinity House or delegates from all the ports concerned. The Society and the Corporation thought the third proposal was the most desirable, but no action ensued,[78] and the next year the Society resisted an attempt to take control of pilotage at Penarth away from Bristol.[79]

In 1861 the Town Council decided to bring to an end the Society's control over pilotage. The decision apparently came as a surprise to the Treasurer, William Claxton, who wrote indignantly in his Journal for 25 June 1861 "The Town Council at their meeting this day repaid the Society for all their good deeds by a Kick in the Bum. They appointed their Docks Committee as Managers of the Pilots, the Society having by delegation from the Corporation conducted the same since the year 1612 – 249 years, and they never said

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[73] *H.B.16*, p. 386, 7 May 1830.

[74] *H.B.17*, p. 218, 2 April 1834.

[75] *H.B.17*, p. 237, 20 June 1834; p. 303, 13 May 1835; p. 320, 8 July 1835; p. 385, 20 April 1836.

[76] *H.B.17*, p. 385, 20 April 1836; p. 393, 11 May 1836; p. 397, 8 June 1836.

[77] *H.B.20*, p. 9, 27 July 1844; *H.B.21*, p. 7, 8 June 1849; p. 9, 26 June 1849; p. 102, 13 Dec. 1850; p. 110, 14 Feb. 1851.

[78] *H.B.21*, p. 359, 13 Jan. 1854; p. 362, 11 Feb. 1854; pp. 382–3, 19 April 1854; p. 384, 12 May 1854; p. 387, 12 May 1854.

[79] *H.B.22*, p. 23, 25 Jan. 1856; pp. 39, 40, 14 March 1856.

Thankee even! Oh!" Claxton went on to record the last annual visit of inspection of the pilots on 5 July 1861. "The Society having annually for 249 years inspected the Pilots and not dreaming for a moment the Management was to be taken from them issued their Summons for this day and went accordingly. It was a very wet and sad day. . . . This is probably the last time of asking."[80] Nothing of this indignation appears in the official minutes which decorously record the visit to Lamplighters' Hall on 5 July 1861 when the pilots were addressed by the Master and by Mr. James Poole, Chairman of the Docks Committee, which was now in charge of the pilots. The minutes also note two letters of thanks, one from the Town Council and one from the Havenmaster, John Drew, whom the Society had recommended to the Corporation twenty years earlier.[81]

THE HAVENMASTER AND THE RIVER

Supervision of the pilots and the river was in the hands of the Havenmaster who was appointed by the Corporation on the recommendation of the Society. In 1808, the Standing Committee reported that the man holding the position was aged and infirm. It proposed that he should be pensioned off and a new man appointed at a salary of £200 a year, half of which should be paid by the Corporation.[82] The Corporation eventually agreed to provide £40 a year for the pension and to make a free gift of £60 a year towards the increased salary during pleasure,[83] and James Jolly was then recommended by the Society as Havenmaster and Ballast Master.[84]

At the end of 1819 there were complaints that the duties of the office were not being satisfactorily performed, particularly with regard to preventing nuisances in the river. The Master and Wardens investigated and found the complaints justified. They recommended that as the task was a very big one, Captain Thomas Davies should be appointed to supervise the river from Rownham to Sea Mills at £50 a year, which was to be deducted from the Havenmaster's salary.[85] By the end of 1824, the Hall decided that Captain Jolly's age and infirmity prevented him carrying out his duties and that he should be replaced and recommended to the liberality of the Corporation. The Society thought that his successor should have £200 a year and that half of this should be paid by the

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[80] *Claxton's Journal I*, pp. 226, 227, 25 June and 5 July 1861.

[81] *H.B.23*, p. 137, 5 July 1861; p. 139, 9 Aug. 1861.

[82] *H.B.14*, pp. 64–6, 28 June 1808. The Havenmaster William Tomlinson had been appointed in 1798.

[83] *H.B.14*, p. 93, 3 Jan. 1810.

[84] *H.B.14*, p. 101, 24 Jan. 1810.

[85] *H.B.15*, p. 51, 3 Dec. 1819; pp. 56, 57, 7 Jan. 1820. In 1822, Martin Hilhouse replaced Captain Davies (*H.B.15*, p. 273, 8 Nov. 1822).

Corporation, since the Society was not under any obligation to pay anything.[86] This was agreed, provided the Society paid half of Captain Jolly's pension. Captain Edward Robe was then selected from 14 applicants.[87] When he died in 1841, John Drew was appointed by a majority vote.[88] He was the last Havenmaster appointed by the Society and in 1861, when the Society ceased to control pilotage, he came under the authority of the City Docks Committee.

There are occasional references to the Warners who gave merchants information about the arrival and departure of ships. In 1825, the Westwardmen of Pill complained to the Society that the Warners did not pay them properly for their services, and the Hall replied that it could not interfere as the Warners were appointed by "the Merchants at large".[89] In 1837, the President of the Commercial Rooms informed the Society that he had arranged for Edward Jones of Pill to report arrivals and departures and asked the Society to pass on the information to all pilots.[90]

Rates for towing by horses also concerned the Society. In 1824, the Havenmaster reported that excessive charges were being made, and the men concerned were asked to come to the Hall. John and William Jones, who hired out horses for towing from Chapel Pill and Sea Mills, said they could not reduce their charges, and the man who let out horses for towing from the Powder House to Broad Pill said that the present rate of 3s. 6d. a horse was in fact too little. The Standing Committee thought it was adequate but that he should have payment if the horses were ordered but not used.[91] When another man offered horses at a cheaper rate, the Committee passed on the information to masters and shipowners.[92]

On occasions, the Society became involved in disputes concerning the watermen or tow-boatmen of Pill. In 1812, they went on strike and hauled pilots' boats ashore in order to disrupt the port. The Havenmaster was instructed to report the matter to the Mayor and to produce the evidence. The watermen petitioned the Hall concerning their wages but it was decided not to consider the petition at present because of "the violent and illegal proceedings". Trouble continued and in 1813 the Society asked the Corporation to meet it in order to consider methods of protecting the Branch Pilots against undue interference. Eventually regulations were drawn up dealing with the relations between pilots and watermen.[93] The watermen gave trouble again in 1825 when they took violent possession of a yawl as a protest against a reduction in wages. The Society investigated the matter and called in a number of pilots who said that the watermen claimed that their wages had been reduced on the recommendation of the Havenmaster who falsely alleged that they had suggested it themselves in the hope of being able to compete with steam packets. The watermen came to the Hall with a petition. They were rebuked for unlawfully combining, but their complaints were investigated, and it appeared that Captain Jolly, the Havenmaster, had been wrong, that the men had not been consulted and that the circumstances did not warrant a reduction in wages. The Corporation was informed of this and repealed its bye-law which had reduced the watermen's wages.[94]

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[86] *H.B.15*, p. 425, 10 Oct. 1824; *H.B.16*, p. 1, 17 Nov. 1824.

[87] *H.B.16*, p. 5, 10 Dec. 1824; pp. 21, 25, 11 Feb. 1825; A. B. Beaven, *Bristol Lists*, Bristol, 1899, p. 247.

[88] *H.B.19*, p. 117, 11 June 1841; p. 127, 6 July 1841; A. B. Beaven, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

[89] *H.B.15*, p. 355, 5 Dec. 1823.

[90] *H.B.18*, p. 19, 10 Feb. 1837.

[91] *H.B.15*, pp. 425, 426, 1 Oct. 1824; *H.B.16*, p. 8, 7 Jan. 1825.

[92] *H.B.16*, pp. 20, 21, 4 Feb. 1825.

The Society also took action from time to time to ensure safe navigation in the river. At the beginning of 1806, for example, the Master and a committee viewed the *Hanover Planter* which had sunk in the river and considered the possibility of removing it with the help of the Sea Fencibles. The Society was prepared to prosecute the owners if they did not take action.[95] Contracts were made on occasions for removing rocks in the river.[96] As early as 1827, the Standing Committee pointed out that the removal of the Round Point, a very serious obstruction to navigation, would be a public benefit and suggested that the Governors of St. Peter's Hospital might consider the matter,[97] but it was not until 1840 that the Society itself undertook the work, making it clear that it did so in the hope that other bodies and interests would take steps to improve the harbour and would also consider making a convenient pier at Portishead or some other place which would not depend on the state of the tides.[98] Tenders were asked for on the basis of specifications supplied by Brunel. The only one received was for £2,994, which was more than Brunel anticipated, and he eventually got Mr. Eglestaff to agree to do the work for £2,368.[99]

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[93] *H.B.14*, p. 212, 6 Nov. 1812; p. 216, 6 Nov. 1812; p. 239, 15 March 1813; p. 247, 26 May 1813; p. 311, 28 Oct. 1814; p. 315, 8 Nov. 1814.

[94] *H.B.16*, p. 23, 11 Feb. 1825; p. 29, 16 Feb. 1825; pp. 31, 32, 22 Feb. 1825; p. 38, 11 March 1825.

[95] *H.B.13*, p. 370, 15 Jan. 1866; p. 372, 4 Feb. 1806; p. 373, 25 Feb. 1806.

[96] *H.B.14*, p. 158, 19 June 1811; *H.B.15*, pp. 16, 17, 17 Aug. 1819; *H.B.16*, p. 379, 5 March 1830.

[97] *H.B.16*, p. 194, 3 March 1827.

[98] *H.B.18*, p. 444, 29 May 1840; p. 450, 1 June 1840.

[99] *H.B.19*, p. 1, 29 June 1840; p. 14, 14 Aug. 1840; p. 18, 15 Aug. 1840. Round Point was a little below St. Vincent's Rocks. In 1852, the Society made a gift of £1,000 to take off a further section and also to remove the rocks on the opposite bank. Even so, the removal was only partial and Round Point continued to give trouble for the rest of the century (Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 250–1).

Something was done to keep the towing paths in reasonable condition and to provide mooring posts for ships.[100] Miscellaneous activities included contributing 20 guineas to Richard Thomas of Falmouth for surveying the Severn and Bristol Channel,[101] payment of half the cost of £60 for erecting a watchtower or observatory for the Havenmaster at Shirehampton, and £20 to provide him with a convenient pew in the new chapel.[102] A donation of £20 was made towards the expenses of Mr. Bunt who had been allowed to erect his tide gauge on the Society's property at Hotwells.[103]

From the late eighteen-thirties, the Society showed some concern about river pollution. In 1838, it complained to the Corporation about the state of the river from Rownham Ferry to St. Vincent's Parade caused by filth from the neighbouring houses. In 1844, it complained that nothing had been done and that the river was highly dangerous to health. In 1847, the Council said that it had postponed taking action pending a government report on sewage, and in 1849 and 1850, the Society was still making the same complaint.[104]

The close connection between the Society and the river came to an end in 1861 when the Hall surrendered the wharfage lease and ceased to control pilotage, but the memory lingered on, and in 1867, Mr. Robert Bruce, as Claxton put it, worried the Society into the desire for a Water Excursion on pretext of visiting the pilots in the Bristol Channel. The proposal was carried by 35 votes to 3, and the Society chartered the steamer *Ely* which set out on 20 August on two trips to Tenby, Lundy and Ilfracombe. Claxton thoroughly disapproved of the venture and commented in his private Journal ". . . before noon such was the state of the weather, and the sea that very few of the company were upright. I will paste a newspaper report at the end of this for three gentlemen of the Press accompanied us. Oh! the vomiting and the reeching were indescribable and what good has been done I humbly and respectfully ask." He was not seasick himself and he enjoyed part of the trip, but he concluded

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[100] For mooring posts etc., see, for example, *H.B.14*, p. 112, 4 July 1810; *H.B.16*, p. 241, 5 Oct. 1827; p. 243, 26 Oct. 1827; *H.B.18*, p. 15, 10 Feb. 1837; p. 26, 17 March 1837; p. 167, 14 March 1838; pp. 237, 238, 12 Sept. 1838; p. 313, 12 April 1839; p. 343, 12 July 1839; p. 353, 9 Aug. 1839.

For towing paths, see, for example, *H.B.15*, p. 3, 3 June 1819; p. 418, 3 Sept. 1824; *H.B.16*, p. 273, 2 April 1825; p. 335, 14 Aug. 1829; *H.B.18*, p. 184, 9 May 1838; *H.B.19*, p. 364, 11 July 1843; *H.B.21*, p. 69, 1 Aug. 1850.

[101] *H.B.14*, p. 385, 3 May 1816.

[102] *H.B.16*, p. 258, 4 Jan. 1828; p. 272, 2 April 1828.

[103] *H.B.18*, p. 243, 12 Oct. 1838. See also *H.B.17*, p. 387, 20 April 1836; p. 403, 24 June 1836; *H.B.18*, p. 346, 12 July 1839.

[104] *H.B.18*, p. 183, 9 May 1839; *H.B.19*, p. 363, 11 July 1843; *H.B.20*, pp. 3, 4, 28 June 1842; pp. 281–3, 8 Jan. 1847; *H.B.21*, p. 12, 3 Aug. 1849; p. 67, 9 July 1850.

"I must say I felt foolish when I heard Mr. Bruce and others declare they would propose an annual sea trip! ! ! I will only say 'so may it not be'."[105]

THE CRANES

The Society continued to control the cranes of the port until 1837. In 1807, when it was losing money on them it obtained an Act of Parliament establishing new rates for cranage as well as for wharfage.[106] In 1810, it decided they would be more productive if farmed out, and it asked for tenders. John Cullis took 4 lots at a rent of £1,100 a year, but in 1813 they were advertised again and let to Mr. Langhorne at £1,420 a year.[107] They were managed directly by the Society between 1825 and 1826 and were then let again at £1,380 a year. The rent was reduced to £1,200 in 1831 as the tenant had been losing money.[108] Against the income had to be offset capital expenditure in erecting new cranes. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners in 1835 remarked that in recent years the number of cranes had been considerably increased and that all berths capable of receiving large vessels had been provided with them.[109]

There were criticisms from time to time of the cranage system and some resistance to the demands made by the Society and its lessees. Thus, in 1821, Mr. Langhorne reported that he was meeting obstruction, in particular from George Hilhouse, formerly Mayor of Bristol.[110] Attempts were made to extract cranage even at parts of the quay where there were no cranes and from vessels which preferred not to use them. The Society conferred with the Corporation and decided that it was not possible to demand cranage in such cases.[111] The Municipal Commissioners in 1835 noted that the growth in the number of cranes had made it impossible for owners to avoid crane berths.[112] Criticism was also based on the belief that these duties formed part of a great collection of port dues which placed Bristol at a serious disadvantage compared with other ports. It was alleged that the Society was making a profit the extent of which was not known and which might, for all the public knew, far outweigh the services rendered. Cosmo publicly asked the Society whether it thought that the receipts ought to exceed the crane-keepers' wages, repairs and expenses of collection. He pointedly remarked that the Society leased the duties to an individual and that he supposed all the profit did not accrue to the tenant.[113] In the face of agitation for a decrease in the port dues, the Society reduced the cranage rates by one quarter in 1825,[114] but no further action was taken until 1835 when a committee of the Corporation made a proposal that the city should take over the remainder of the Society's lease.[115] Negotiations went on in 1836 and 1837, and it was eventually agreed that the Society should surrender its lease in 1837 and pay £450 in lieu of its obligation to hand over the cranes in good order.[116] The use of the cranes was to be voluntary and the rates were to be reduced. The Corporation confirmed the arrangement on 29 April 1837.

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[105] *Claxton's Journal II*, pp. 59 ff., 20 Aug. 1867. The journal contains the report which had fun at the Society's expense. The trip is solemnly recorded in the Minutes (*H.B.25*, p. 195, 30 Aug. 1867) which refers to "a rather rough passage".

[106] See p. 310 and n. 22.

[107] *H.B.14*, p. 127, 27 Sept. 1810; p. 256, 25 Aug. 1813.

[108] *H.B.16*, p. 76, 7 Oct. 1825; p. 264, 17 Jan. 1838; *H.B.17*, p. 15, 15 April 1831.

[109] *Report from the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations in England and Wales; Bristol*, p. 64.

[110] *H.B.15*, p. 203, 5 Dec. 1821.

[111] *H.B.15*, p. 303, 14 March 1823.

[112] *Report from the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations; Bristol*, p. 64.

MERCHANT SHIPPING AND MERCHANT SEAMEN

Some of the functions which in earlier times had been performed by the Society were dealt with by the Society of Shipowners with which the Hall cooperated from time to time on matters of mutual concern.[117] Thus, in 1827, Robert Bright, chairman of the Shipowners' Committee, wrote to the Merchant Venturers suggesting the advantage of a bridge across the Pill at Broad Pill. The Hall agreed to recommend the proposal to the Corporation and stated that it would be happy at all times to communicate with the Shipowners.[118] In June, the Shipowners complained about the charges for towing with horses, and the Hall replied that it would do its best to get better terms.[119] When Robert Bright urged on behalf of his Society the need for mooring posts on the river for ships coming to Bathurst Basin, the Hall ordered that steps should be taken to provide them.[120] The Merchant Venturers for their part referred a

[113] *Letters on the Impediments which obstruct the Trade and Commerce of the City and Port of Bristol by Cosmo*, Bristol, 1823, p. 69.

[114] *H.B.15*, p. 313, 6 May 1823; p. 343, 7 Nov. 1823; p. 354, 5 Dec. 1823; *H.B.16*, p. 51, 6 May 1825; p. 59, 3 June 1825; p. 65, 9 July 1825; p. 72, 9 Sept. 1825.

[115] *H.B.17*, p. 312, 6 June 1835.

[116] *H.B.17*, p. 432, 5 Oct. 1836; *H.B.18*, p. 24, 17 March 1837; p. 40, 14 April 1837. See *H.B.21*, p. 450, 9 Jan. 1855 and p. 483, 20 April 1855 for subsequent comments on the surrender of the lease.

[117] Very little seems to be known about the Society of Shipowners which grew up in later eighteenth-century Bristol.

[118] *H.B.16*, p. 200, 4 May 1827.

[119] *H.B.16*, pp. 209, 210, 27 June 1827.

[120] *H.B.16*, p. 235, 14 Sept. 1827.

number of matters to the Shipowners, such as the proposed new light on Nash Point in 1830[121] and a bill for new tonnage measurements which came up in 1835. On that occasion, the Hall made a donation of 10 guineas to the Shipowners' Society and agreed to pay an annual subscription of £2 2s.[122] In the same year, the Shipowners asked the Hall for its support for a motion for the repeal of the Reciprocity Duties Act, and the Hall agreed to ask members to help.[123] In 1836, the Merchant Venturers asked the Shipowners' Society to give its opinion on a bill vesting lighthouses and seamarks in the hands of Trinity House and also thanked it for a report of its successful application to Trinity House for a reduction of pilotage charges on vessels towed by steam.[124] Next year, the Shipowners' Society asked for help concerning a proposal to modify a bill relating to tolls imposed at Fishguard, and the Hall decided to prepare a petition and forward it to the M.P.s.[125] In 1842, the Hall was asked by the Shipowners to give its views on a bill for the examination of masters and mates, and two members were appointed to examine it.[126] The Shipowners' Society also received the cooperation of the Hall in 1858 in an address to the crown on the restrictions placed on British shipping in foreign ports.[127]

Although the Shipowners' Society seems to have been active in matters relating to merchant shipping, the Society still retained its interest. On a number of occasions, it was concerned with the adverse effects of quarantine regulations and it intervened at national and local level to press for modifications.[128] In 1814 and 1815 it was involved in the troubles arising from resentment by the sailors about the employment of foreign seamen. The Mayor informed the Hall that on 27 and 28 July 1814 large numbers of sailors had assembled and boarded vessels at the quays in search of foreign seamen. He had warned the sailors that their proceedings were unlawful, and they dispersed, but they then petitioned the Hall for help. The Society decided that it had no power to interfere, but asked the Mayor to consider calling a general meeting of shipowners and seamen and thanked him for his prompt and judicious action in suppressing unlawful proceedings. On 1 September 1815, in reply to a petition from the seamen, the Society recommended merchants and shipowners to employ British sailors in preference to foreigners, provided they behaved properly.[129]

[121] *H.B.16*, p. 388, 7 May 1830.

[122] *H.B.17*, p. 290, 11 Feb. 1835.

[123] *H.B.17*, p. 303, 13 May 1835.

[124] *H.B.17*, p. 406, 6 July 1836; p. 433, 12 Oct. 1836.

[125] *H.B.18*, p. 139, 13 Dec. 1837.

[126] *H.B.19*, p. 267, 27 July 1842.

[127] *H.B.22*, p. 280, 22 Oct. 1858.

[128] *H.B.13*, p. 318, 21 Nov. 1804; *H.B.14*, p. 240, 21 May 1813; *H.B.16*, p. 328, 5 June 1829; *H.B.17*, p. 171, 18 Oct. 1833.

[129] *H.B.14*, p. 302, 30 July 1814; p. 364, 1 Sept. 1815.

The Society's distrust of interference by the central government was shown in the resistance it offered to various bills proposing to examine and regulate masters and mates of merchant ships. When the Collector and Comptroller of the Customs in Bristol forwarded the draft of one such bill to the Hall in 1827, the Society sent copies to the Shipowners' Society and others interested in shipping and informed the Collector that the bill would add to the burdens and difficulties of owners.[130] Similar opposition was offered in 1834 to a Seamen's Registry Bill,[131] and in 1842 and 1843 to a bill for the examination of masters and mates. The Hall thought it highly objectionable "that any Public Body should be elected to examine Persons for the situation of Masters and Mates of Ships . . . thereby interfering with the private Rights and Judgment of Shipowners who from the very nature of their Business, it must be presumed, are the most competent to form an opinion of the capabilities of the Persons they would select to take charge of their Property . . .".[132]

In spite of laissez-faire opposition, the Board of Trade persisted in its determination to establish a satisfactory system of examinations for masters and mates, and the Society fought a number of rearguard actions against central control. In 1846, the Standing Committee reported that it did not like the proposed system of examinations and that, as the regulations stood, it was not prepared to play a part in local examinations.[133]

The Society, in conjunction with Glasgow and Liverpool and the Shipowners of Bristol, also opposed the Mercantile Marine bill of 1850.[134] This lengthy bill placed the superintendence of matters relating to the mercantile marine in the hands of the Board of Trade which was empowered to establish local Marine Boards, partly nominated, partly elected, in the ports. There were to be examinations for masters and mates, which might be carried out by the Local Boards. Those who had served as masters or mates up to 1 January 1851 could get "certificates of service", but in future masters and mates must pass an examination and get a "certificate of competency". No foreign-going ship was to sail unless the master and one of the mates had a certificate. There were very extensive regulations concerning conditions of service for seamen.[135] This was state interference in a big way, and the Society petitioned the Commons against the bill as being novel in principle and as "placing the whole details of the conduct of a Trade or Business under the practically despotic control of a government department". It argued that there was no case for placing shipping on a different basis from other trades or businesses and it maintained that the great body of shipowners in Bristol took this view.[136] The bill nevertheless became law in August 1850, and a local Marine Board was set up in Bristol.

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[130] *H.B.16*, p. 244, 26 Oct. 1827; pp. 256, 257, 7 Dec. 1827; pp. 258, 262–3, 4 Jan. 1828; *Letter Book IV 1826–1833*, p. 99, 24 Oct. 1827; p. 101, 1 Nov. 1827; p. 112, 26 Dec. 1827.

[131] *H.B.17*, p. 236, 20 June 1834; p. 239, 2 July 1834; p. 246, 6 Aug. 1834.

[132] *H.B.19*, p. 332, 10 Feb. 1842; *Sub-Committee Book 1842–1846*, p. 5, 8 Feb. 1843. The Society argued that it was highly objectionable that patronage and influence should be vested in the Trinity House "self elected and therefore irresponsible as that Body must be . . .".

[133] *H.B.20*, p. 197, 23 Jan. 1846. Two years later, it changed its mind (*H.B.20*, p. 348, 14 Jan. 1848).

[134] *H.B.21*, p. 51, 15 March 1850; p. 63, 14 June 1850.

There followed a conflict between the local members of the Board and the Board of Trade because the Bristol Board had not been given the same powers as boards in some other ports, particularly the right to grant First Class certificates. A number of Bristol members of the local board resigned and the Local Board came to an end. The Society thereupon petitioned the Privy Council, stating that the whole mercantile community had learnt with regret of the resignation of the local representatives who were well known for their experience and knowledge. It claimed that much of Bristol's shipping required First Class certificates and that it was unfair that Bristol should be treated differently from inferior ports such as Newcastle, Shields and Sunderland.[137] The fact that Bristol had been treated as a second-class port by the Board of Trade indicates that it had lost its former importance, but the Society was reluctant to face reality.

The Hall was also interested in the first half of the century in lighthouses and in tolls affecting Bristol shipping. Thus in 1809 and 1810 it investigated the charges on Bristol ships made by the owners of Long Ship and Scilly Lights,[138] and in 1815 it alleged that tolls were being improperly collected by Burnham lighthouse.[139] In 1830 it considered a proposed light on Nash Point and after getting the views of the Shipowners' Society reported in favour of it.[140] Such matters naturally brought it into frequent contact with Trinity House, and when the Elder Brethren decided to visit Bristol in 1837 to discuss buoys and a possible floating lightship in the Bristol

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[135] 13 and 14 Vic. c. 93, 14 Aug. 1850: An Act for improving the condition of masters, mates, and seamen, and maintaining discipline, in the merchant service.

[136] *Book of Petitions*, p. 223, June 1850.

[137] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 225 ff., n.d. See *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 156, 4 Feb. 1851 for the deputation sent to London.

[138] *H.B.14*, p. 85, 8 Nov. 1809; p. 97, 3 Jan. 1810.

[139] *H.B.14*, p. 352, 4 July 1815; p. 354, 18 July 1815 when it withdrew its opposition; p. 382, 23 Jan. 1816. See also *H.B.16*, pp. 420–2, 29 Oct. 1830, when it pointed out to Trinity House the "utter unutility" to Bristol of Burnham Light.

[140] *H.B.16*, p. 388, 7 May 1830; p. 392, 11 June 1830; p. 416, 29 Oct. 1830. For subsequent trouble with Trinity House over this light, see *H.B.17*, p. 12, 11 March 1831.

Channel, the Society agreed to meet them and to place at their disposal a room in the Hall. The Committee was favourably disposed to the proposals of Trinity House and it also recommended petitioning for a reduction of the charges made by the Holmes Light.[141] Next year, when the Shipowners' Society prepared a bill to amend an Act for the improvement of Fishguard Harbour which imposed certain tolls, the Society agreed to send a petition to the House of Commons and subsequently to the House of Lords.[142]

In 1838, the Society asked Trinity House to reduce the toll at Flatholm and to exempt Bristol ships from the charges in connection with Burnham Light.[143] A bill concerning Tenby harbour also came up this year and the Society maintained that it gave an unfair advantage to Tenby men and put duties on shipping for street improvement as well as for improvement to the pier and dock. A deputation was sent to London and some amendments were made in the bill.[144] There was resistance also in 1839 to Redcar Harbour bill which imposed tolls on shipping, and it was decided to petition both houses.[145]

Some concern was shown for the safety of ships and seamen. In 1842 there was sympathy for Mr. H. W. Heaven's proposal for a harbour at Lundy which would charge tolls and the Society decided that if a definite scheme was presented, it would consider it favourably.[146] In 1858 the Standing Committee decided to collect evidence and to press the Commons Committee on Harbours of Refuge to establish such a harbour at Lundy for the Bristol Channel area.[147] Occasional interest was shown in lifeboats. When Mr. William Lassall attended the Standing Committee in 1812 with a model of his lifeboat, he was asked to leave it in some place where it could be inspected by nautical persons.[148] Gifts were made from time to time to help particular lifeboats such as £10 to Barnstaple in 1831 and 10 guineas to Bude in 1837.[149] When the National Lifeboat Association asked in 1863 for help with a new boat in the Bristol Channel, the committee turned down the request on the ground that jurisdiction in the Bristol Channel was no longer in the hands of the Society, but it recommended that the subscription to the Association should be increased from £2 2s. to £5 5s. a year,[150] and three years later a grant of £50 was made to the Association.[151]

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[141] *H.B.18*, pp. 99, 100, 12 Sept. 1837; p. 103, 22 Sept. 1837.

[142] *H.B.18*, p. 139, 13 Dec. 1837; *H.B.18*, p. 142, 10 Jan. 1838; p. 182, 9 May 1838. For the two petitions, see *Book of Petitions*, p. 190, Jan. 1838; p. 193, May 1838.

[143] *H.B.18*, p. 142, 10 Jan. 1838.

[144] *H.B.18*, pp. 164, 165, 14 March 1838; p. 172, 25 April 1838; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 191–2, March 1838.

[145] *H.B.18*, p. 330, 5 June 1839.

[146] *H.B.19*, p. 212, 11 Feb. 1842.

[147] *H.B.22*, p. 243, 30 March 1858.

[148] *H.B.14*, p. 189, 13 April 1812.

[149] *H.B.17*, p. 47, 5 Aug. 1831; *H.B.18*, p. 13, 13 Jan. 1837.

The Society also made a valuable contribution to the welfare of seamen by its administration of the Seamen's Hospital Fund and played some small part in training seamen through its Marine School, but these activities can be more conveniently treated elsewhere.[152]

From what has been said, it will be evident that during the first half of the nineteenth century the Society of Merchant Venturers still retained a considerable interest in the docks, the river and the sea, but that it gradually relinquished its interests. It gave up control of the cranes in 1837; in 1848 the Corporation took over the docks from the Docks Company on which the Merchant Venturers had been strongly represented; the Seamen's Hospital Fund was wound up in 1852. In 1861 the wharfage lease was surrendered and the Society was also deprived of its control over the pilots. Inevitably, the Society changed its character and concentrated its energy on other kinds of activity.

[150] *H.B.23*, p. 283, 16 May 1863.

[151] *H.B.24*, p. 82, 3 May 1866.

[152] See pp. 394–8.

CHAPTER 19

The Society as a Property-Developer in the Nineteenth Century

As has been seen already, the Society became in the second half of the eighteenth century an important property-developer, increasingly conscious of the potentialities of the land it had acquired. It had already begun to exercise planning control over buildings erected on its land, and it had become in some measure involved with questions of roads, drainage and water supply. In the course of the nineteenth century, the population of Bristol expanded at an unprecedented rate, and the value of the Society's lands, particularly in the highly desirable area of Clifton, increased rapidly. The development of railways in and around Bristol and the needs of public authorities for particular pieces of land for dock and road development enabled the Society to make some valuable capital gains, and the loss of its major source of income – the wharfage lease – provided an added incentive for property development. Property management became a major concern of the Society as it was compelled to abandon some of its earlier activities, and it was only because its capital was limited that it was prevented from making even greater use of the potentialities of its lands in Bristol.[1]

The major developments were in Clifton and in Hotwells. Here the Society was only one of a number of owners such as the Worrall family and the Adams family who were in a position to make gains from the increasing demand for land, but its holding was on a considerable scale and it was able to make a significant contribution to the way in which the area was developed. To examine in detail the whole of the Society's contribution would require more space than is available here, but some indication can be given by considering its general policy and by looking at some of the areas in which it was particularly active.

THE SOCIETY AS A PLANNING AUTHORITY

At a time when the local authority exercised only very limited control over planning, the Society was able to use its influence in various ways to ensure that certain standards were observed in the general lay-out of particular areas and in the construction and use of the houses erected. It was, of course, in its own interest to do so, since it was concerned with property values, but there was also gain to the community.

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[1] In 1837 the Hall asked Mr. Marmont to make a survey of its Clifton estates, and in 1839 it appointed him Superintendant and Receiver of the Clifton Estates (*H.B.18*, p. 113, 13 Oct. 1837; p. 125, 3 Nov. 1837; p. 293, 11 Jan. 1839; p. 305, 22 Feb. 1839).

The general policy which the Society adopted towards would-be developers is illustrated in a letter sent to Mr. Ormerod in 1810 when he offered to lay out £3,000 in erecting good, substantial houses on Honeypen Hill, provided the Hall would give him a 40 year building lease renewable every 14 years. The Clerk wrote to Mr. Ormerod saying "They direct me to inform you that they must have a plan and elevation of the proposed Buildings laid before them before they can give any answer. They were of the opinion from the situation of the ground and its vicinity to Bristol that no buildings ought to be erected but such as would be an ornament to the place."[2] When Baker and Studley offered to develop land off Pembroke Road in 1879, they were informed that "in the opinion of the Society the class of House which they proposed to erect was not good enough for the situation."[3] At the end of the century, when Lennards Ltd., wanted to buy 16 houses in Park Place for redevelopment, they were told that there would be restrictive covenants to prevent the carrying on of any offensive business, that the plans would have to be approved by the Society and that the façade facing Queen's Road must not be inferior to that of the shops opposite. The original plans were turned down because the elevation was thought not to be of a sufficiently ornamental character for the situation.[4]

The Society showed throughout the period great interest in preserving the amenities of the areas with which it was concerned and was often sensitive to the feelings of other occupiers. When a man wanted land for a gunpowder magazine at Hotwells, the Hall refused to give permission and was prepared if necessary to instruct counsel to oppose the scheme at the Quarter Sessions.[5] In 1813 Lady Miller's application to build a room behind her house in Prince's Buildings was turned down on the ground that it would be a "serious Evil to other houses by obstructing their view down the river".[6] When George Powell of Prince's Buildings engaged in blasting operations, he was told to stop, "a large stone having fallen whilst the Committee was on the spot".[7] In 1873, Mrs. Clarke, who leased Cornwallis House and who had opened part of the land in her garden to raise iron, was required to discontinue the work and although the Clerk stated that there was nothing in the lease to prevent the Hall giving permission, it refused to do so since the residents of Cornwallis Crescent and the Polygon had petitioned against the proposal.[8]

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[2] *Letter Book I 1781–1786*, p. 379, 7 June 1810.

[3] *H.B.26*, p. 232, 31 Jan. 1879.

[4] *H.B.28*, p. 291, 18 Nov. 1898; p. 305, 24 March 1899; p. 307, 28 April 1899.

[5] *H.B.14*, p. 145, 16 Jan. 1811. See also *H.B.15*, p. 337, 2 Sept. 1823; p. 338, 9 Oct. 1823.

[6] *H.B.14*, p. 252, 23 Jan. 1813; p. 253, 4 Aug. 1813. The Society was, however, willing to let her have a piece of rocky ground at £5 per annum.

Generally speaking, the Society was ready to encourage plans to maintain and increase the amenities of the residential areas in which it owned property. Thus, in 1810 when the Surveyors of Highways of Clifton wished to collect subscriptions to level and plant part of Clifton waste, the Hall give its approval, provided it was shown the plans, and it agreed to subscribe generously itself.[9] In 1820, it gave permission to the inhabitants of Windsor Terrace to make a footpath behind the terrace on the Society's waste.[10] It was less happy about a proposal of Richard Hart Davis to allow his subtenant to make a nursery and to erect an ornamental cottage on land opposite Richmond Terrace, since the residents were not pleased with the idea, but it decided it could not decently refuse planning permission, subject to certain conditions,[11] and it also gave consent to a proposal from the ladies of Clifton to put up an iron fence which would allow sheep through but which would enable them to enjoy a walk "Without the danger of being rode over."[12]

Another occasion on which the Society cooperated with local residents concerned the Richmond Hill property. In 1856 a number of gentlemen in that area asked for help in removing unsightly buildings between Richmond Hill and Queen's Road and in turning part of the land into an ornamental garden or pleasure ground. The Society contributed £100 to the subscription. The next year, Richmond Hill Improvement Committee reported that it had made a provisional agreement with the proprietor of the land to remove all buildings except a greenhouse belonging to D. Baskerville. About £1,200 had been raised, but another £400 was needed. If the Hall would contribute the required £400, the Improvement Committee was willing to convey the land to the Society, subject to certain conditions, and thus bring to a successful issue "an Improvement so much required". In September 1857, the Hall accepted the offer and decided to remove the unsightly buildings and to erect a new wall.[13]

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[7] *H.B.16*, p. 290, 5 Sept. 1828.

[8] *H.B.25*, p. 273, 26 Sept. 1873; p. 312, 27 Feb. 1874. In 1875, two workmen alleged that Messrs. G. and I. Cooke had been secretly working iron in their fields opposite Royal York Crescent and had deliberately concealed the borings from the Society. After investigation, the Society decided that this was an attempt of the workmen to blacken the character of Mr. Cooke's agent (*H.B.25*, p. 396, 26 Feb. 1875).

[9] *H.B.14*, p. 116, 10 July 1810.

[10] *H.B.15*, p. 87, 5 May 1820.

[11] *H.B.15*, p. 399, 7 May 1824.

[12] *H.B.15*, p. 406, 2 July 1824; p. 409, 9 July 1824.

It was well known that the Society was interested in maintaining the amenities of those areas in which it owned property, and in 1864, when Lewis Fry was negotiating to buy Goldney House and 7 acres of land, his solicitors asked the Society to treat for the land of Hill Close. They were probably hoping to get it at a reasonably low price when they stressed "the importance the Society has attached to keeping open this land as one of the important features in the view of Clifton". The Hall cautiously replied that in order to preserve the view, it did not wish to build there, but it would not bind itself not to do so. Fry offered £1,000, but the Society wanted £2,000, and it eventually granted a 10,000 year lease for £2,000 and a rent of 5s. a year.[14]

The desire to maintain the high-class character of the neighbourhood may possibly explain the Society's lack of enthusiasm for a market in Clifton. A plan to make a market at Honeypen Hill or at the Triangle had been approved by the City's Finance Committee in 1844, but it was turned down by the Council.[15] In 1851, the Clifton Improvment Society asked for the Society's support and claimed to have a petition with 1,300 signatures. The Hall considered the proposal, but did not give its support, and the plan was again rejected by the Council.[16] When the application was renewed in 1867, the Society referred it to a committee but took no action.[17]

Particularly in the second half of the century, the Society's records are full of applications for permission to alter or to change the use of property of which it was ground landlord and on which it had placed restrictive covenants. In 1871, for example, application was made to use 1, Beaufort Road as a Boys' School "for a limited number of high class boys who would not use the garden as a playground". The Hall gave limited, revocable consent.[18] Four years later, it agreed that 2, Apsley Road might be used as a Ladies' School and an extra storey added, provided the neighbours did not object and provided the plans were approved.[19] On the other hand, it would not allow 15, Merchants' Road to be used as an unlicensed refreshment house.[20] It would not permit Pembroke Hall to be used as a "Pharmacy" and it would not agree to Mr. Summerson's building land at Jacob's Wells being let for roundabouts and swings.[21] Permission was given to Mr. Newnes in 1893 to use 14, Prince's Buildings as a residential hydropathic establishment on the lines of Smedley's Hydropathic Establishment at Matlock and to connect the Spa Room with a nearby garden by means of an underground passage,[22] but an application to make 3, Prince's Buildings into a Temperance Hotel was refused.[23] In 1900, proposals to establish schools at 10, Apsley Road and at 70, Pembroke Road were turned down,[24] and in 1901 the Hall would not agree to Clifton Spa Company applying for a licence or to 6 Princes' Buildings being used as a private Surgical Home.[25]

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[13] *H.B.22*, p. 111, 12 Dec. 1856; p. 121, 10 Jan. 1857; pp. 184, 185, 28 Aug. 1857; p. 188, 11 Sept. 1857; p. 230, 12 Feb. 1858.

[14] *H.B.23*, p. 370, 28 June 1864; p. 413, 21 Jan. 1865; *H.B.24*, p. 12, 5 July 1865.

[15] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 322.

[16] *H.B.21*, p. 121, 14 March 1851; Latimer, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

[17] *H.B.24*, p. 170, 17 May 1867. Another scheme was turned down by the Council in 1875 (Latimer, *op. cit.*, p. 323).

[18] *H.B.25*, p. 43, 22 March 1871.

[19] *H.B.26*, p. 23, 31 Dec. 1875.

There were numerous applications for minor structural alterations and for the erection of greenhouses, summer houses, verandas and bay window, and permission was usually given, provided the neighbours did not object and provided the Society was satisfied with the plans.[26] Sometimes the Society took a strong line. When the owner of 8, Victoria Square enlarged his window in 1863, the Clerk was doubtful if action could be taken, but the Committee thought it so essential "to preserve the uniformity of this Row of Houses" that he was instructed to get counsels' opinion.[27] When Mr. Eberle wished to erect a billiard room in his garden at 96, Pembroke Road, permission was refused because his neighbour. Miss Taylor, objected.[28] The covenants had to be taken seriously, When two people in Hanbury Road put up greenhouses without permission, they were told to take them down again. They hastened to apologise and were then allowed to keep them.[29]

One interesting development in the last part of the century which depended on obtaining planning permission from the Society was an hydraulic lift from Hotwells Road up the face of the rock to Clifton. Proposals were put forward by Messrs. Broad and Pottow and also

[20] *H.B.26*, p. 138, 31 Aug. 1877.

[21] *H.B.27*, pp. 445, 446, 30 Sept. 1892.

[22] *H.B.28*, p. 49, 24 Nov. 1893; p. 56, 26 Jan. 1894. See also *H.B.27*, p. 203, 27 May 1887, for planning permission to the Clifton Spa Company.

[23] *H.B.28*, p. 50, 24 Nov. 1893.

[24] *H.B.28*, p. 360, 29 June 1900; p. 369, 19 Oct. 1900.

[25] *H.B.28*, pp. 392, 393, 22 Feb. 1901.

[26] See, for example, *H.B.26*, p. 139, 31 Aug. 1877 (greenhouse, 14, Oakfield Road); p. 168, 22 Feb. 1878 (summerhouse, 1, Sherborne Villas); p. 203, 27 Sept. 1878 (enlarged scullery, 2, Leigh Road); p. 269, 31 Oct. 1879 (trellis on garden wall, 1, Leigh Road); p. 400, 24 Feb. 1882 (veranda, 1, Leigh Road; new wing, 13, Miles Road; 2 bays in front and 1 behind, 4, Litfield Place).

[27] *H.B.23*, p. 292, 1 Aug. 1863.

[28] *H.B.28*, p. 318, 30 June 1899.

[29] *H.B.26*, p. 270, 31 Oct. 1879; p. 283, 19 Dec. 1879.

by George Newnes, M.P. Permission was at first refused, but the Society agreed in 1890 to Newnes' scheme, which affected 14 and 15, Prince's Buildings, provided the ground rents of the houses were increased from £17 10s. and £10 to £60 and £40 and provided certain other conditions were accepted and the plans approved by the Society. The hydraulic lift or Rocks Railway was opened in 1893.[30]

BUILDING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE CENTURY

In the early nineteenth century, the Society endeavoured to complete the building of Cornwallis Crescent. In 1791, the land had been granted on a 40 year building lease to Mr. Elderton but he failed in the crisis of 1796. Part of the property was granted to Mr. Worrall, who was to complete within 14 years the houses already begun, and the remainder, on which 33 houses were to be built, to Mr. Brooke, who agreed to complete 15 houses within 14 years and another 18 by the time of the second renewal of the lease. Brooke subsequently got the whole of the property by assignment from Worrall and agreed to complete 16 houses by 1821 and the rest by 1835. In fact, he had completed only 9 houses by 1821, although 7 others were in the course of construction. In spite of the fact that he had not fulfilled his contract, the Society decided not to take action but required him to finish all the building by 1835.[31] The work was completed by that date when his widow was given a renewal of the lease for a fine of £1,385.[32]

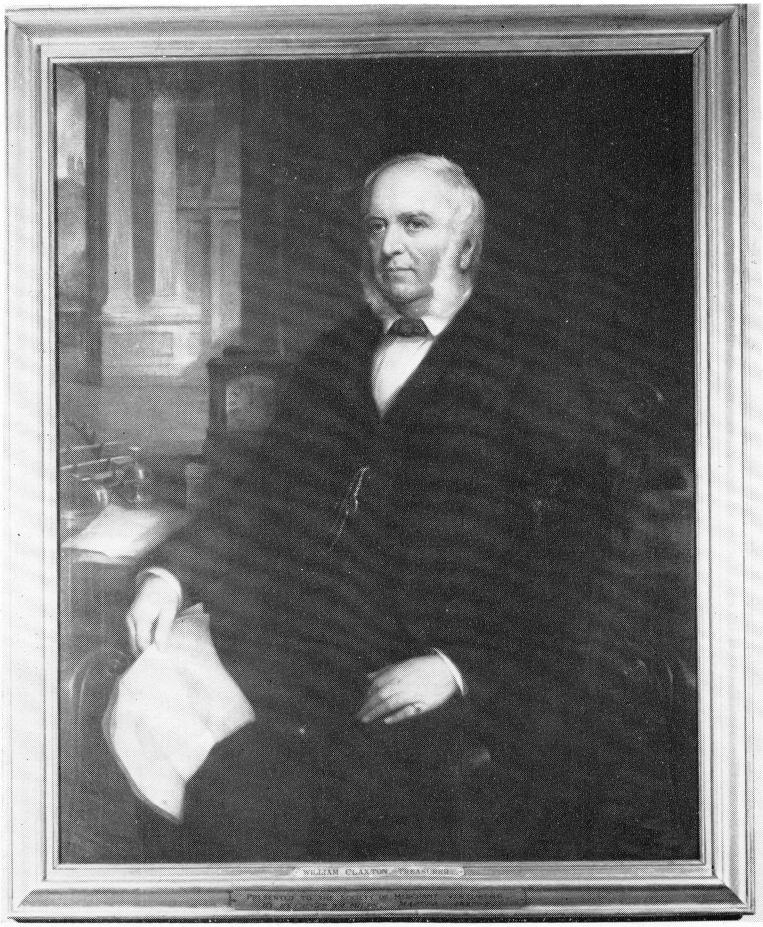
Another attractive building development on the Society's land was the Polygon, built in the eighteen-twenties on ground leased to Henry Brooke by leases of 1821 and 1823, both renewable every 14 years. Henry Brooke sub-let to the builder, George Jones, and on 8 May 1826 he certified that the 12 messuages forming the range known as the Polygon had been erected.[33]

[30] *H.B.27*, p. 303, 27 Sept. 1889; p. 350, 26 Sept. 1890; p. 379, 27 Feb. 1891; p. 383, 24 April 1891; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals 1887–1900*, pp. 19 ff. Newnes undertook to open a hydropathic institution including a Pump Room. This was opened in 1894. Three houses in Prince's Buildings were subsequently reconstructed to make the Clifton Grand Spa Hydro, opened in 1898.

[31] *H.B.15*, pp. 139 ff.; 13 March 1821; pp. 158, 159, 5 June 1821; p. 237, 22 June 1822; p. 243, 9 July 1822; p. 269, 8 Nov. 1822. See also *H.B.16*, p. 72, 9 Sept. 1825; p. 125, 7 April 1826. See also the *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*.

[32] *H.B.17*, p. 292, 11 Feb. 1835; p. 297, 8 April 1838; p. 300, 13 May 1835. The total annual rents of the houses in 1854 were £2,654 (*H.B.21*, p. 359, 13 Jan. 1854).

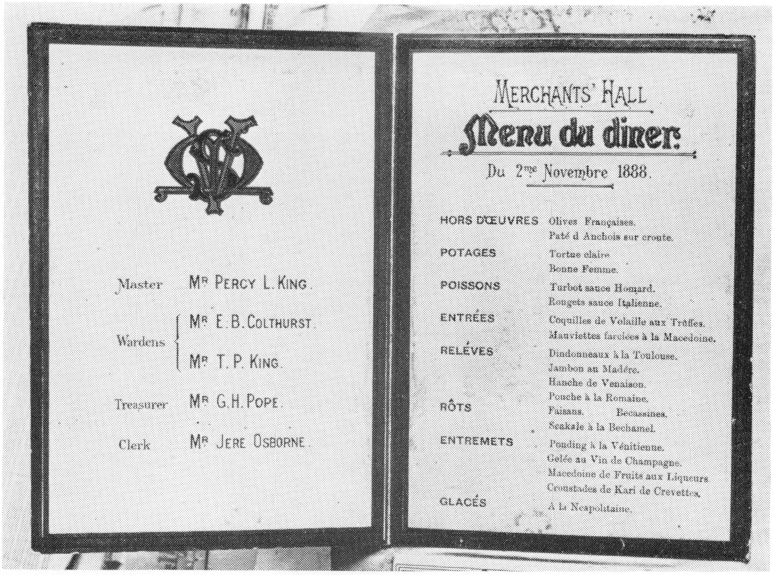
[33] *H.B.16*, p. 363, 4 Dec. 1829. See also Societys' Plans, No. 24, for a very interesting plan of the Polygon and a long statement about the various grants from 12 June 1821. In 1853, ground rents from Cornwallis Crescent, the Polygon and adjoining property were valued at £223 10s. od. (*H.B.21*, p. 313, 13 May 1853).


WILLIAM CLAXTON – TREASURER

Portrait of William Claxton, Treasurer of the Society, 1841–1873, in the Merchants' Hall.

See p. 264.

Photograph by G. Kelsey



Master	Mr Percy L. King.
Wardens	Mr E. B. Colthurst. Mr T. P. King.
Treasurer	Mr G. H. Pope.
Clerk	Mr Jere Osborne.

Merchants' Hall

Menu du diner.

Du 2^{me} Novembre 1888.

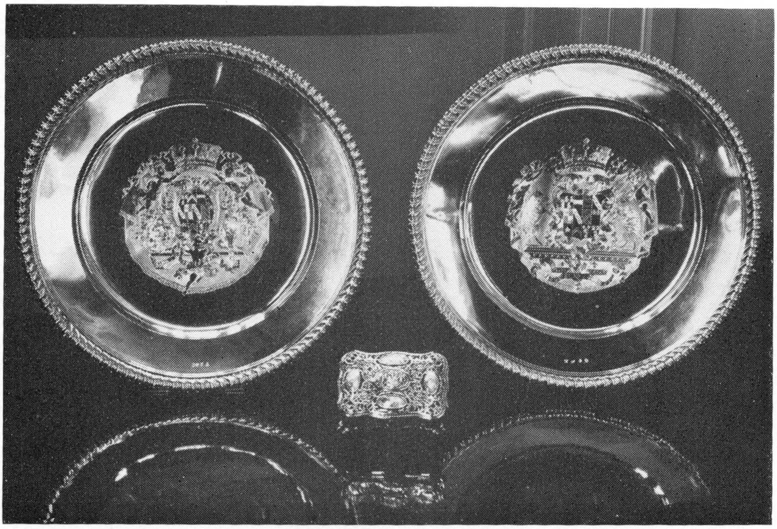
HORS D'ŒUVRES	Olives Françaises. Paté d Anchois sur croute.
POTAGES	Tortue claire Bonne Femme.
POISSONS	Turbot sauce Homard. Rougets sauce Italienne.
ENTRÉES	Coquilles de Volaille aux Truffes. Mauviettes farciées à la Macedoine.
RELÉVES	Dindonneaux à la Toulouse. Jambon au Madére. Hanche de Venaison. Pouche à la Romaine.
RÔTS	Faisans. Becassines. Seakale à la Bechamel.
ENTREMETS	Pouding à la Vénitienne. Gelée au Vin de Champagne. Macedoine de Fruits aux Liqueurs Croustades de Kari de Crevettes.
GLACÉS	A la Neapolitaine.

Above: Menu for a dinner in the Hall, 1888.

Photograph by G. Kelsey

Below: Two silver chargers of the time of William III, presented to the Society by the first Lord Dulverton in 1937. Silver box in which the freedom of the Society was presented to Philip William Skynner Miles, M.P. in 1851.

Photograph by G. Kelsey



In 1810 the lessees of Honeypen Hill Fields (Richmond Hill) asked permission to change their 99 year lease for 3 lives to a 40 year building lease, renewable every 14 years, and undertook to lay out £3,000 in building. They were asked to submit plans,[34] but no action was taken, and another request to the same effect was made in 1822, when a building lease was granted to Mr. Benjamin Tucker.[35] In 1825, he reported that 12 of the 32 tenements he had covenanted to build were nearly completed and asked for a renewal of his lease.[36] By 1829, Tucker had built the 32 houses he had agreed to erect, except for 5 in Park Place.[37] When the lease was renewed in 1837, there were 17 houses in Park Place and 15 dwellings on Richmond Hill with an annual value of £2,073. The renewal fine was fixed at that sum.[38]

Other building developments included York Place and Clifton Place. In 1805, when the lease of the ground on which York Buildings stood came up for renewal, Messrs. Langton and Company offered to lay out £2,500 in building in addition to the 8 houses already there.[39] By 1832, the yearly value of the premises due for renewal in York Place, York Buildings and Clifton Place was estimated at £1,539, and the renewal fine was fixed at that amount.[40]

In another part of Clifton, plans were made in the eighteen-twenties to develop three closes of land known as Cecils Litfields. These had been leased to Mr. Deverell, but in 1818 the Society decided to buy his interest. He was offered £2,550 but he asked for £2,800, and this price was agreed.[41] The Society had difficulty in raising the money and Deverell had to be asked to wait two years for completion, which he agreed to do provided he got interest.[42] An attempt was made unsuccessfully to dispose of some of the land for £1,000 an acre.[43] An offer of £500 an acre was turned down in 1821, and it was decided, as a temporary measure, to let the 16 acres at £90 a year at one month's notice.[44] Two years later the Master and two others were asked to consider laying out the land for building,[45] but next year the plans submitted for houses were considered unsatisfactory as the principal rooms were too small, and it was decided to advertise the land for disposal in lots.[46] Eight building lots were laid out for what was to be called Camp Place and Camp Buildings. Approval was given to the plans for one of the plots in 1825,[47] but in 1827 the purchasers of lots 6 and 7 asked for a reduction of ground rents since the property had deteriorated and some of those who had engaged to take lots had been frightened away. The Society agreed to postpone collecting ground rents for a year and reduced the selling price. It wanted £800 to £900 a lot or, alternatively, a fee farm rent of £36 to £40 a year. A new road was eventually built to serve the property, but disposal of the lots dragged on until 1836.[48]

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[34] *H.B.14*, p. 94, 3 Jan. 1810.

[35] *H.B.15*, p. 228, 17 April 1822; p. 238, 4 July 1822.

[36] *H.B.16*, p. 92, 9 Nov. 1825.

[37] *H.B.16*, p. 332, 5 June 1829. See also *H.B.16*, p. 375, 5 March 1830.

[38] *H.B.18*, p. 55, 17 May 1837. In 1879, the renewal fine on Richmond Hill was £862 and on Park Place £666 (40 year leases renewable every 14 years). See *H.B.26*, pp. 253, 254, 27 June 1879.

[39] *H.B.13*, p. 336, 3 June 1805.

[40] *H.B.17*, p. 118, 4 Sept. 1832.

[41] *H.B.14*, p. 521, 3 Dec. 1818; p. 528, 21 Jan. 1819.

[42] *H.B.14*, p. 536, 4 March 1819.

[43] *H.B.14*, pp. 547, 549, 15 April 1819.

[44] *H.B.15*, p. 144, 3 April 1821.

[45] *H.B.15*, p. 326, 1 July 1823.

[46] *H.B.15*, p. 411, 6 Aug. 1824; *H.B.16*, p. 7, 10 Dec. 1824.

The difficulties of disposing of Camp Place lots may have discouraged the Society from further development of Cecil Litfields for some time. In 1851, it asked Mr. Marmont to lay out the field for further building, but ten years later it was negotiating with Mr. Thomas Proctor who wanted to buy two acres of Cecil Litfields at £1,000 an acre. Mr. Proctor preferred to buy the whole area of 6 acres, 2 rods and 10 perches and offered £6,100. The Society considered that it would be a long time before it would be able to dispose of it all in separate building lots and accepted the offer. Next year, Mr. Proctor asked to be allowed to buy 2 acres behind Litfield Place, and the Hall agreed to sell at £1,700.[49] It might have done better to wait.

VICTORIA SQUARE

The most ambitious and the most troublesome scheme with which the Society became involved in mid-nineteenth century was the building of Victoria Square, Clifton. This was built on a plot of land known as Ferney Close which was let by the Society on a lease for lives. In 1837, a prospective purchaser estimated its value at £1,000. In 1838, he offered £2,000, but this was turned down as was his second offer in 1840.[50] John Evans Lunell, who held the lease, then offered to develop the land and to build a market and road, but this was not acceptable.[51] When he proposed in 1844 to divide the land into building lots and to put them up to auction, the Hall instructed its Clerk to attend the auction and to inform bidders that the

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[47] *H.B.16*, p. 104, 10 Nov. 1825. Camp Place was later called Litfield Place (*H.B.18*, p. 401, 26 Nov. 1839).

[48] *H.B.16*, pp. 237, 238, 21 Sept. 1827; p. 260, 4 Jan. 1828; p. 369, 1 Feb. 1830; p. 389, 7 May 1830; p. 391, 11 June 1830; *H.B.17*, p. 40, 1 July 1831; p. 141, 16 Jan. 1833· p. 380, 20 April 1836; *H.B.18*, p. 319, 12 April 1839.

[49] *H.B.21*, p. 314, 13 May 1843; *H.B.23*, pp. 152, 156, 11 Oct. 1861; p. 159, 2 Nov. 1861; p. 171, 13 Dec. 1861; p. 189, 14 Feb. 1862; p. 213, 3 May 1862; p. 230, 31 Oct. 1862.

[50] *H.B.18*, p. 97, 8 Sept. 1837; p. 239, 12 Oct. 1838; p. 441, 8 May 1840.

[51] *H.B.19*, p. 214, 11 Feb. 1842; p. 224, 11 March 1842; p. 240, 13 May 1842.

Society would not give its consent.[52] The Society then bought out Lunell's interest for £1,000, raising the money on bond,[53] and was free to go ahead with its own development plans.

Ferney Close was roughly square in shape, and one possibility was to treat the row of houses known as Lansdowne Place as one side of a new square, and to complete the other three sides, making appropriate arrangements with the owner and occupiers of Lansdowne Place. Another was to make not a square but two crescents more or less forming an oblong and not incorporating Lansdowne Place. In either case, there was to be an open space or garden in the middle. A third possibility, if the owner of Lansdowne Place would not come to terms, was for the Society to build a complete square, in which case the occupants of Lansdowne Place would find themselves looking out not on an open space but on one side of the Society's new square.[54]

The first set of plans incorporating Lansdowne Place as one side of the square were considered by the Standing Committee on 14 February 1845, and the Society made an offer to preserve the part in front of Lansdowne Place houses as an open space, provided it received a ground rent of £3 a year from each house.[55] When no reply had been received in March, Mr. Marmont was instructed to mark out the land for building on the basis of making a completely new square.[56] The Society then received an offer of £750 to keep open the space in front of Lansdowne Place, but it required £1,000.[57] Mr. Hemming, the owner of Lansdowne Place, became extremely indignant and stated that "he cannot submit to the Terms on which the Society of Merchants propose not to injure his Houses . . . by building immediately opposite them", and there were protracted and acrimonious negotiations between the Society and Mr. Hemming's agents who accused the Society's Clerk, Mr. Osborne, of not stating clearly the Society's terms. The Society exonerated its Clerk and said there was no point in further discussion.[58]

In January 1846, the Ferney Close Committee reported that it had heard from Mr. Hemming in Londonderry who said he had been out of England for two years and had been compelled to leave matters to his agents. He referred to Lansdowne Place as "the finest Row of Buildings erected . . . in your neighbourhood and built in the best and most substantial manner." He would like to take advantage of the Society's generous offer and he appealed, he said, "to your best feelings . . .". The Ferney Close Committee thought that in view of the expense incurred in drawing up alternative plans, the Society should not renew its earlier offer, but should ask Mr. Hemming to pay £1,500, which was to include £350 spent on the alternative plans. In addition, the water supply for Lansdowne Place was to come from the Society's Waterworks at a rate not exceeding 3 per cent of the annual value of each house, and Mr. Hemming was to fill in his cesspool and link his houses to the Society's sewer at a rate of £1 per annum for each house. There were also certain other conditions. The General Hall reduced the amount required to £1,000 plus £350 expenses for the useless plans.[59] Mr. Hemming accepted the terms, but he did not pay the money and when action was taken against him in 1850, he alleged that he had "no option but to submit to almost any terms however unreasonable that the said Complainants might choose to impose", even though his agents, Savery and Clarke, considered them "extortionate and wholly unreasonable". He argued that he had been led to believe that the Merchant Venturers would proceed quickly with building the other three sides of the square and that this would considerably increase the value of his houses and so provide some compensation. In fact they had so far (December 1850) erected only one side, and he would perform his part of the agreement when they had completed theirs.[60] Thus, the Society found that the path of the property developer was far from smooth. It was clearly unreasonable of Mr. Hemming to expect that his houses should continue to enjoy, without some payment, "a view for a considerable distance over Ferney Close", but on the other hand the Society had attempted to drive a hard bargain, no doubt because of its concern for its own finances and the heavy expenses in connection with the ill-fated Waterworks Company.[61]

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[52] *H.B.19*, p. 420, 9 Feb. 1844.

[53] *H.B.20*, p. 40, 18 Oct. 1844; p. 71, 22 Nov. 1844.

[54] For the first two plans, see Merchants' Hall Plans, no. 45; for the third, see the Clerk's Papers, bundle marked "Victoria Square, 1849" (now in archive group – Estates, Clifton).

[55] *H.B.20*, p. 96, 14 Feb. 1845.

[56] *H.B.20*, p. 106, 14 March 1845.

[57] *H.B.20*, p. 116, 5 June 1845.

[58] *H.B.20*, pp. 157 ff., 16 Oct. 1845 for further details. See also the Clerk's Papers, bundle marked "Victoria Square, 1849" (Estates, Clifton).

Meanwhile, the development of one side of Ferney Close went ahead. The Society rejected a proposal of the Improvement Committee of the Town Council to make a road through the centre of the square and stood by its plan of preserving an open space in the middle,[62] and it made a contract with William Bateman Reed to erect houses on one side in accordance with its plans. It was to receive ground rents and it regulated the use of the houses by restrictive covenants in the leases.[63] In August 1847, Reed asked for a

[59] *H.B.20*, p. 193, 28 Jan. 1846.

[60] Clerk's Papers, bundle marked "Victoria Square, 1849" (Estates, Clifton).

[61] See pp. 413–26.

[62] *H.B.20*, p. 296, 26 March 1847; p. 303, 23 April 1847.

[63] The various deeds, building leases and other agreements are listed in the Society's *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*, pp. 275 ff.

loan of £5,000 on the security of six houses already completed and five others which were well advanced, and he was given this at 5 per cent.[64] In May 1848, he asked for a further loan to complete the houses. He said he was unable to dispose of any of them while building was still going on but that the row would be worth £30,000 when completed. It was agreed to lend him £6,000 at 5 per cent.[65] In December 1849, he asked for another £2,000 to complete the work, and this, together with earlier loans and interest, brought his total indebtedness to the Society up to £15,000. He had by that date contracted to sell only one house for £2,000, and the purchase money was to go to the Society.[66] Sales proceeded slowly, and it was not until 1853 that Reed was able to report the sale of No. 7 at £1,750, of Albert Lodge at £1,800 and his own purchase of No. 8 on mortgage at £1,500. He was evidently short of capital, and the Society agreed to his request that it should take on account only £1,000 of the purchase price in each case.[67] Prices dropped in 1854 when Nos. 3, 11 and 4 fetched only £1,450 each,[68] and the Society turned down Reed's suggestion that it should itself take four houses for £6,950.[69] In March 1853 there were still six houses unsold, and Reed asked to be allowed to keep half the purchase price on the sale of four of the houses, leaving a debt of about £3,000 to the Society to be secured on Nos. 9 and 10, which he valued at £3,500. The Society agreed to take from sales only so much money as would leave a debt of £2,500.[70]

It was not until August 1853 that the sale of the block of fourteen houses was completed, bringing in ground rents of just over £200 a year.[71] The cost of laying out the land, making roads and providing iron railings round the central enclosure had been approximately £2,200, and it seems likely that the slow sale of the houses and the need to make continual loans to the builder discouraged the Society from rushing ahead with the development of the other two sides of the square. The Society had, moreover, undertaken to lay out and maintain the ornamental plantation and gardens in the centre of the square, and maintenance was by no means cheap. In 1855, Messrs. Garraways signed a contract to look after the plantation for one year for £40,[72] and the Society turned down a request from the occupants to pay half the cost of running the ornamental fountain and painting the railings.[73]

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[64] *H.B.20*, p. 315, 13 Aug. 1847.

[65] *H.B.20*, pp. 378, 379, 26 May 1848.

[66] *H.B.21*, p. 37, 14 Dec. 1849. The first house to be sold was No. 2 which went to Miss Christian Smith on a lease of 10,000 years dated from 29 Sept. 1846 at a ground rent of £15.

[67] *H.B.21*, p. 331, 14 Oct. 1853.

[68] *H.B.21*, p. 382, 19 April 1854; p. 395, 16 June 1854; p. 408, 11 Aug. 1854.

[69] *H.B.21*, p. 438, 8 Dec. 1854.

[70] *H.B.21*, p. 460, 9 March 1855.

[71] *H.B.21*, p. 475, 16 April 1855; p. 491, 8 June 1855; p. 509, 3 Aug. 1855. Ground rents were £15 per house except for Albert Lodge at £7 10s. 0d.

In 1858, the Society purchased Carter's Brewery, near Victoria Square, through which it later built Merchants' Road, Clifton,[74] and next year it considered further building in Victoria Square,[75] but took no further action. In 1861 it showed interest in a proposal to build a large hotel in the square, but the residents objected that they had bought their houses on the understanding that the ground would eventually be covered with other houses of similar class and character.[76] Then, in 1863 Mr. Marmont was instructed to tell respectable parties who wanted to build that they could have reasonable loans from the Society on the security of the buildings.[77] An offer was forthcoming from John Yalland who was willing to erect 12 houses on the west side of the square, provided he was given financial help, and the Society entered into an agreement with him to build in accordance with Marmont's plans and on the basis of ground rents producing £144 a year.[78]

By 1866, Yalland had erected six houses, but was unable to sell them or to fulfil the rest of his contract.[79] The Building Land Committee thought Yalland was asking too much for the houses, and various negotiations followed concerning a further loan. By November, the six houses had been disposed of, and in January 1867 Yalland was released from the rest of his contract.[80] Thus, twenty years after the scheme had been inaugurated, the Society had managed to build only one of its three sides of the square and half of another side.

Plans for laying out the south side of the square for double or single villas had been made in 1865 when one of the plots had been assigned for a parsonage house for Clifton as a gift from the Society,[81] but development was held up, and it was not until February 1869 that the Building Lands Committee made an agreement with John Davies, a builder from Redland, to erect four substantial houses which were to be finished by March 1870. The Society was to lend

[72] *H.B.21*, p. 461, 9 March 1855.

[73] *H.B.21*, pp. 501, 502, 13 July 1855. Garraways reduced the charge to £35 per annum in 1857 (*H.B.22*, p. 138, 13 March 1857).

[74] *H.B.22*, pp. 231, 234, 12 March 1858; p. 251, 14 May 1858; p. 333, 16 Feb. 1859; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 266. The Society had refused to purchase in 1855 (*H.B.22*, p. 10, 14 Dec. 1855).

[75] *H.B.22*, p. 319, 3 March 1859.

[76] *H.B.23*, p. 171, 13 Dec. 1861; p. 177, 10 Jan. 1862.

[77] *H.B.23*, p. 269, 20 March 1863.

[78] *H.B.23*, p. 284, 5 June 1863.

[79] *H.B.24*, p. 92, 15 June 1866.

[80] *H.B.24*, p. 92, 15 June 1866; p. 102, 22 June 1866.

[81] *H.B.23*, p. 420, 1 Feb. 1865; *H.B.24*, pp. 49, 50, 22 Dec. 1865.

£1,000 on each house, and, when the roofs were on, was to lend up to two-thirds of the cost. The ground rents were to be £15 a year.[82] In May 1870 Davies asked for his advance of two-thirds on the cost as the roofs would be on within a week.[83]

There still remained the part of the west side of Victoria Square which Yalland had failed to complete. In March 1870 the Building Lands Committee recommended an advance of three-quarters of the estimated expense to any builder who would complete the work.[84] In October, the Society accepted Davies's offer to build on the five remaining plots. The centre houses were to cost £1,600 and the end houses £2,000 each, and the Society would lend three-quarters of the amount of work certified to have been done at any one time at 5 per cent.[85] It was not until March 1874 that the Society put its seal to the leases of the last five houses (nos. 21–5).[86]

Thus, the building of Victoria Square had taken over twenty-five years and had involved the Society in a good deal of trouble, including financing three different builders. In return, the Society now received ground rents of £424 10s. a year,[87] but it had saddled itself with the upkeep of an ornamental garden and plantation which was over the years to give it considerable trouble. In 1874, for example, it received a report stating that the trees were overcrowded and that there were no keys to the gates, so that the public used the garden "often, we fear, when dark . . . for immoral purposes . . .". It was ordered that new gates should be fixed, new locks should be provided and the railings were to be mended.[88] In 1879, it was decided to spend £60 instead of £45 a year on upkeep.[89]

The occupants of the houses were apt to make demands on their ground landlord. In 1879, they wanted to construct a tennis court, and permission was given provided they submitted the rules for its use to the Society. These were approved in due course, and the Hall made a donation of £30.[90] In 1886, the paths required remaking and the Society agreed to pay half the cost.[91] There were a number of other difficulties, and in the next century the Society made determined and ultimately successful efforts to get rid of a burden which had proved much heavier than it expected.[92]

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[82] *H.B.24*, p. 323, 24 Feb. 1869; p. 395, 21 Jan. 1870; p. 410, 4 March 1870.

[83] *H.B.24*, p. 431, 6 May 1870; p. 436, 1 July 1870.

[84] *H.B.24*, p. 417, 18 March 1870.

[85] *H.B.25*, p. 7, 21 Oct. 1870; p. 44, 22 March 1871. An earlier offer by Davies had been turned down (*H.B.24*, p. 440, 5 Aug. 1870).

[86] *H.B.25*, pp. 317, 318, 27 March 1874.

[87] *H.B.25*, p. 318, 27 March 1874.

[88] *H.B.25*, p. 318, 27 March 1874.

[89] *H.B.26*, p. 241, 28 March 1879.

[90] *H.B.26*, p. 241, 28 March 1879; p. 256, 4 July 1879.

[91] *H.B.27*, p. 155, 26 Feb. 1886.

[92] See pp. 472–4.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN CLIFTON

In 1872, a sub-committee reported on the Society's ground rents which amounted by then to over £2,000 a year. Of this, £1,250 came from modern houses in Clifton. The sub-committee suggested that the Hall should dispose of less attractive ground rents, amounting to £730 17s. 6d. a year, and thus raise a capital sum of between £14,000 and £16,000 to be invested in such a way that it could be easily available.[93] There were, however, difficulties in disposing of the ground rents.[94]

In the eighteen-sixties and in the seventies and eighties, the Society was busy developing its property in and adjoining Pembroke Road (formerly Gallows Acre Lane). It owned over 7 acres, and from the mid-sixties it was granting building leases to a number of builders, including James Rowe Shorland, William Hain Junior and Richard Coslett who constructed houses which paid ground rents to the Society and which were subject to restrictive covenants.[95] It is not possible here to follow in detail this building development which was spread over a period of nearly twenty years, but some indication can be given of the roads in the development of which the Society was wholly or partially concerned.

Beaufort Road was given its name in 1868 at the suggestion of Miss Eliza Cooke, one of the purchasers of the new houses and the Society also decided to give another of the new developments the name of All Saints Road.[96] Miles Road, leading from Beaufort Road to All Saints Road, was given its name by the Society in the same year,[97] and building lots, subject to ground rents of £10 2s. 6d., were being sold from 1870 onwards.[98] Leigh Road, which ran across

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[93] *H.B.25*, pp. 164 ff., 26 July 1872. The ground rents which it proposed to sell were: Belle Vue, 19 houses plus 7 in Lower Belle Vue and a house behind the Infants' School, total value £78 p.a.; Merchants' Parade, Hotwells, 19 houses, value £82 p.a.; Brunswick Place, Hotwells, 12 houses, 9 cottages, value £40 p.a.; Charles Place, Woburn Place, Merchants' Parade and Love Street, £94 3s. 0d. p.a.; Dowry Parade, Hotwells, 3 houses, £9 19s. 6d.; St. Vincent's Parade, 2 houses, £10 p.a.; the Polygon, 12 houses, £60; Belle Vue Terrace and Clifton Hill, 7 houses, £15; Berkeley Vale, Clifton, 8 houses, £22 p.a.; St. Vincent's Terrace, Hotwells, £31 10s. 0d. p.a.; Merchants' Place, Hotwells, shop and bakehouse, £7 p.a.; Cornwallis Crescent, 40 houses and pleasure ground, £206 p.a.; Richmond Court, Clifton, dwelling house, £8 p.a.; Love Street, Hotwells, £8 p.a.; Upper Park Street, 2 houses, £20 p.a.; Harley Place, strip of land, £8 8s. 6d. p.a.; Infants' School, Merchants' Parade, £15 p.a.

[94] *H.B.25*, p. 227, 5 April 1873; p. 248, 30 May 1873.

[95] Numerous deeds relating to the property are in the Society's archives and are listed in the Society's *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*, pp. 267 ff.

[96] *H.B.24*, p. 256, 15 May 1868. [97] *Ibid.*

[98] *H.B.24*, pp. 434, 435, 3 June 1870; *H.B.25*, 7 Dec. 1870; p. 25, 13 Jan. 1871; p. 65, 7 July 1871; p. 118, 29 Dec. 1871; p. 119, 26 Jan. 1872; p. 141, 26 April 1872; p. 157, 28 June 1872.

Oakfield Road to Oakfield Place, was also developed from the early eighteen-seventies by Richard Coslett. The ground rents were £8 9s. for Leigh Road East and £12 10s. for Leigh Road West.[99] From the eighteen-seventies onwards, Richard Coslett also developed Hanbury Road, running from Alma Road across Oakfield Road to Pembroke Road.[100] The Hanbury Road scheme included what was really a separate piece of development known as Hanbury Road South (later Eaton Crescent).[101] From the eighteen-seventies, the Society also granted building loans to Richard Coslett and others for houses in Oakfield Road at ground rents varying between £11 and £18 a year.[102] In the same decade, there was further building in Alma Road, part of which had been constructed in the early eighteen-sixties when Roydon Villas had been erected as a result of a building lease granted by the Society and Messrs. Worrall to their lessee William Merrick.[103] Other grants in the eighteen-seventies concerned houses in Apsley Road,[104] and in the later part of the decade and in the early eighteen-eighties a number of first-class villas were built in the part of Pembroke Road between Oakfield Road and Hanbury Road at ground rents of £35 or £40 a year.[105]

Another important development in Clifton which cannot be followed in detail here was the making of Merchants' Road, which linked Victoria Square with the rest of Clifton. This was made possible by the Society's purchase of Carter's Brewery.[106] In February 1869 the Local Board of Health thanked the Society for handing the road over and agreed to ask the Council to widen the entrance. The Society requested that it should be known as Merchants' Road and in the early eighteen-seventies was busily engaged in making agreements and fixing ground rents.[107]

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[99] For the deeds relating to Leigh Road East, see *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*, pp. 812 ff., and for Leigh Road West, see pp. 821 ff. There are also numerous references in the Hall Books.

[100] *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*, pp. 815 ff. and numerous references in the Hall Books.

[101] *H.B.26*, p. 168, 22 Feb. 1875; p. 195, 26 July 1878.

[102] For Oakfield Road grants, see *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*, pp. 824 ff., and numerous references in the Hall Books.

[103] *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*, pp. 271, 731 ff. The joint building lease for Roydon Villas had been granted 23 Feb. 1854.

[104] *H.B.24*, p. 432, 6 May 1870; *H.B.25*, p. 59, 9 June 1871; p. 83, 16 Aug. 1871; p. 119, 26 Jan. 1872; p. 127, 16 Feb. 1872; p. 399, 26 Feb. 1875; p. 427, 25 June 1875; *H.B.26*, p. 3, 27 Oct. 1875.

[105] *H.B.26*, p. 180, 31 May 1878; p. 193, 26 July 1878; p. 239, 28 Feb. 1879; p. 340, 21 Jan. 1881 (Oaklands); *H.B.27*, p. 66, 25 July 1884 (Lyndhurst).

[106] See p. 340.

[107] *H.B.24*, pp. 322, 323, 24 Feb. 1869; p. 363, 27 Oct. 1869; *H.B.25*, p. 164, 26 July 1872; p. 175, 27 Sept. 1872; p. 247, 30 May 1873; p. 282, 25 Oct. 1873, etc.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

There were many other developments in Clifton in which the Society was involved, but it is not possible to cite them all here. A few illustrations can be given of its efforts to raise property values in other parts of its estates such as Hotwells and Jacob's Wells. Thus, in 1816, it decided to advertise a piece of land near Cumberland Basin on a 40 year lease, renewable every 14 years, for constructing small houses according to the plans it laid down,[108] and in 1825 it gave a lease to John and William Jones to build 15 houses on ground behind Jenning's Stable, Hotwells.[109] William Jones also had a building lease from the Society to erect houses in Merchants' Parade and Merchants' Avenue, Hotwells.[110] In 1839 the Crown and Anchor, Hotwells Road, was reported to be in a dilapidated state, and it was eventually decided to rebuild it at a cost of £1,000 and to purchase adjoining property in order to continue the widening and improving of Hotwell Road which the Society had already commenced at Merchants' Parade.[111] In 1844, when property at Jacob's Wells fell into the Society's hand on expiration of a lease of 1802, it refused to renew the lease and decided to let it only on a yearly basis until it had sufficient property in hand to effect a general improvement in the class of building,[112] and in 1863, a committee reported on property in the area bounded by Gorse Lane, Clifton Hill and Jacob's Wells Road and recommended taking down the houses, which were of a most miserable description, and letting the land on ground rents for building according to its own plans. It thought that Jacob's Wells should be treated in the same way later on.[113] Yet another example of this policy was found in 1874 when some of the property at Jacob's Wells was reported to be in a bad condition. It was decided to give notice to quit to the tenants and to sell the land for redevelopment.[114]

THE MERCHANTS' DOCK ESTATE

As has been noted earlier, the Society had acquired in the later eighteenth century Champion's Floating Dock and two other docks, as well as a considerable amount of the adjoining property, and it had secured an Act of Parliament requiring timber and other combustibles to be brought to the Merchants' Dock.[115] The Floating Dock presented many problems in connection with the clearing of mud, the repair of the gates and the collection of dock dues.[116] Income dropped from £648 5s. in 1827 to £137 0s. 3d. in 1840.[117] The obligations of the Society under the original Act were increasingly burdensome and the building of the Floating Harbour early in the nineteenth century and the growth of private quays, wharfs and warehouses meant a decline in revenue. In 1842, the Society successfully petitioned Parliament for repeal of the Act.[118]

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[108] *H.B.14*, p. 391, 30 May 1816.

[109] *H.B.18*, p. 327, 10 May 1839, referring to the failure to build more than 4 of the 15 houses specified.

[110] *Schedule of Deeds No. 2*, p. 409, for lease relating to this property.

[111] *H.B.18*, p. 337, 14 June 1839; p. 343, 12 July 1839; p. 368, 11 Oct. 1839; pp. 399–400, 29 Nov. 1839; p. 374, 29 Oct. 1839.

[112] *H.B.19*, p. 418, 9 Feb. 1844.

[113] *H.B.23*, p. 310, 29 Oct. 1863. For various building leases in Gorse Lane, see *H.B.24*, p. 173, 17 May 1867; p. 176, 19 July 1867; p. 410, 4 March 1870.

[114] *H.B.25*, p. 305, 23 Jan. 1874.

It is not possible here to examine in detail the way in which the Society developed in the nineteenth century the considerable dock property which it had acquired. The Merchants' Dock itself was let out from time to time.[119] In 1836 over £1,000 was spent on enlarging and improving the Graving Dock.[120] which was held on lease by various tenants including George Hilhouse, the Great Western Steam Packet Company and George Lunell.[121] In 1855, it was let to George Kelson Stothert and Ernest Theophilus Fripp on a 27 year lease at £465 a year on condition that they laid out £5,000 on improvements.[122] Another dock was leased first of all to George Hilhouse and then to Charles Hill and Sons, shipbuilders.[123]

Towards the end of the century, the Society entered into negotiations with the Great Western Railway Company to sell half an acre of the Floating Dock Estate at £2 per square yeard and the whole of Limekiln Dock for £5,000. There were legal difficulties because

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[115] See pp. 154–5.

[116] See, for example, *H.B.14*, p. 237, 4 March 1813; *H.B.15*, p. 55, 7 Jan. 1820; *H.B.17*, p. 94, 4 April 1832; *H.B.19*, p. 334, 3 March 1843; p. 338, 16 March 1843; p. 369, 14 July 1843; *H.B.22*, p. 260, 18 June 1858; *H.B.24*, pp. 98, 101, 22 June 1866; pp. 315 ff., 2 Feb. 1869.

[117] *Floating Dock Rent Account 1818–1844.*

[118] *H.B.19*, p. 153, 20 Sept. 1841; p. 160, 4 Nov. 1841; *Book of Charters 2*, p. 203, 1842.

[119] *H.B.25*, p. 235, 9 May 1873, agreed to lease the Merchants' Dock to the Corporation at £250 per annum for 14 years. See also *H.B.25*, p. 314, 27 March 1874; *H.B.27*, 8 Jan. 1887.

[120] *H.B.17*, p. 380, 20 April 1836; p. 448, 8 Nov. 1836.

[121] *H.B.14*, p. 478, 3 March 1818; p. 486, 19 May 1818; p. 500, 4 Aug. 1818; p. 547, 15 April 1819; *H.B.15*, p. 18, 2 Sept. 1819; p. 23, 23 Sept. 1819; p. 24, 7 Oct. 1819; p. 74, 3 March 1820; p. 78, 15 March 1820; *H.B.17*, p. 136, 8 Dec. 1832; p. 169, 4 Sept. 1833; p. 306, 13 May 1835; p. 358, 13 Jan. 1836; *H.B.20*, p. 112, 9 May 1845.

[122] *H.B.21*, p. 453, 2 July 1855; p. 474, 16 April 1855; *H.B.22*, 14 Dec. 1855. For late arrangements with Stothert, see *H.B.25*, p. 234, 9 May 1873; *H.B.26*, p. 422, 22 June 1882; *H.B.27*, p. 2, 23 Feb. 1883; p. 172, 27 Aug. 1886; p. 188, 17 Dec. 1886; p. 321, 31 Jan. 1890; p. 353, 31 Oct. 1890.

[123] *H.B.21*, p. 50, 15 March 1850; *H.B.26*, p. 219, 29 Nov. 1878; *H.B.27*, p. 197, 29 April 1887; p. 252, 20 July 1888.

Stotherts were not willing to surrender their rights, and the Society had to bring an action against them. It was successful, and at the beginning of the new century the Society was free to proceed with arrangements with the Great Western Railway Company to develop the Canon's Marsh area.[124]

Some of the land adjoining the Floating Dock was also used during part of the nineteenth century as a Bonding Yard for timber, wood, pitch, tar and naval stores. As early as 1803 the Society had been interested in establishing a bonded warehouse, but there were various difficulties to be overcome, and it was not until 1819 that the consent of the Treasury was obtained and the work completed. The Society then issued its Rules and Regulations for the Bonding Yard and Warehouses.[125] In the later nineteenth century some of this land was leased to the Corporation as a place for the landing of foreign cattle,[126] and in 1893 another part was let on a building lease to Mr. Galbraith who undertook to build 36 houses producing for the Society ground rents of £465 a year.[127]

THE HOTWELL

The Hotwell was one of the Society's less fortunate investments. As has already been seen, it was leased at a very low rent for most of the eighteenth century, and the short burst of prosperity at the end of the period and in the early nineteenth century did not last.[128] In 1816, the Society's profit was only £73, and by 1820 receipts were not covering expenditure. Nevertheless, the Society was still convinced of the potentialities of the Hotwell, and shortly after Dr. Andrew Carrick of Clifton had addressed a paper to the Hall suggesting how the well might be restored to its former importance,[129] plans were made for improvement. The building near the river was to be replaced by a new Pump Room further back, and access to the well was to be made easier by a road at least twenty feet wide.[130] There were possibly hopes of developing the export market, and when Messrs. Kidd and Fisher, who were about to send the *Albion* to India, asked permission to take some of the water, they were requested to take three old casks and three new puncheons as well as a minimum of three dozen bottles, and to report on their condition on arrival.[131]

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[124] *H.B.28*, p. 209, 26 Feb. 1897; p. 216, 30 April 1897; p. 220, 1 May 1897; p. 342, 26 Jan. 1900.

[125] *H.B.13*, p. 257, 2 Sept. 1803; pp. 261 ff., 12 Sept. 1803; p. 269, 1 Oct. 1803; p. 306, 23 Oct. 1804; p. 329, 12 March 1805; *H.B.14*, p. 30, 8 Nov. 1808; p. 434, 12 Feb. 1817; p. 426, 19 March 1817; p. 437, 20 May 1817; p. 452, 16 Sept. 1817; p. 476, 20 Feb. 1818; p. 480, 3 March 1818; p. 486, 19 May 1818; p. 550, 6 May 1819; *H.B.15*, p. 39, 6 Nov. 1819.

[126] *H.B.26*, p. 132, 27 July 1877; p. 156, 21 Dec. 1877; p. 205, 25 Oct. 1878. In 1900 the Society asked the corporation for a rent of £450 for a renewal of the lease for 7 years (*H.B.28*, p. 361, 29 June 1900).

[127] *H.B.28*, p. 8, 24 Feb. 1893; p. 12, 24 March 1893; p. 117, 28 June 1895; p. 169, 4 June 1896; pp. 173, 175, 3 July 1896; p. 175, 4 July 1896; p. 199, 18 Dec. 1896. Under this agreement were built Oldfield Road and Sandford Place.

[128] See p. 193. Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 217 ff., *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 71 ff., Vincent Waite, *The Bristol Hotwell*, pp. 10 ff.

[129] Latimer, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 ff., *H.B.14*, p. 484, 14 April 1818.

It took a long time to get plans and estimates, and it was not until 1 April 1819 that the Standing Committee decided to adopt Mr. Robert Dyer's Plan No. 1. for the new Pump Room.[132] The procedure then followed was less than straightforward. The Standing Committee asked Henry Hake Seward of London, one of the other architects who had submitted plans, to report on Dyer's work, and he offered to produce another plan or, alternatively, to act as professional consultant. It was decided to tell Dyer that his plan had many merits but that there were some objections, and he was to be told not to make an amended plan at the Society's expense. The Standing Committee wished the matter to be handled with discretion, and it seems that it was not being frank with Dyer.[133] Dyer did in fact submit alternative plans,[134] but on 16 July 1819 the Committee approved Seward's design No. 3 and asked him to prepare specifications and to advertise for tenders.[135] In January 1820 the Committee decided not to ask for tenders until the finance of the scheme had been considered.[136] In March, it was reported that the money could be raised if the Society offered 5 per cent for a fixed period of years subject to 12 months' notice of withdrawal,[137] and in April the Committee accepted a tender from a builder, John Foster, for £3,269 for erecting the new Pump Room, baths and other works. Seward was appointed architect and surveyor at the usual 5 per cent on contract price. He was to appoint a clerk of the works on the same terms as he had done in building the new Gaol.[138] In July, the Committee received Seward's report on the extra work required and attended the laying of the foundation stone underneath which were placed a glass bottle and several new silver coins.[139]

Work went on for two years and various additional expenses were incurred, bringing the cost up to more than £4,000. In 1821, for example, Seward was instructed to enlarge the entrance and to get estimates for heating the baths with warm air. A wall had to be constructed to exclude the tide water from the existing Hotwell House, and two patent pneumatic stoves were ordered at a cost of £120. Four veined marble baths, a marble fountain, a marble chimney piece and other furnishings cost £121. A tender for plumber's work came to £166, a bookcase cost £19 and a new wall £153 10s.[140]

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[130] *H.B.14*, p. 424, 28 Jan. 1817; p. 444, 3 June 1817.

[131] *H.B.14*, p. 450, 11 July 1817.

[132] *H.B.14*, p. 476, 20 Feb. 1818; p. 478, 3 March 1818; p. 493, 29 May 1818; p. 523, 17 Dec. 1818; p. 539, 15 March 1819; p. 540, 1 April 1819.

[133] *H.B.14*, p. 544, 8 April 1819; pp. 547, 548, 15 April 1819. For Seward, see Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bristol*, p. 44.

[134] *H.B.14*, p. 549, 6 May 1819.

[135] *H.B.15*, p. 10, 16 July 1819; p. 25, 7 Oct. 1819; p. 36, 18 Oct. 1819.

[136] *H.B.15*, p. 58, 21 Jan. 1820.

[137] *H.B.15*, p. 74, 3 March 1820.

[138] *H.B.15*, p. 82, 14 April 1820; p. 84, 17 April 1820.

[139] *H.B.15*, p. 95, 6 July 1820.

There was some alarm about the use of iron pipes to carry the water, as a report from Dr. Carrick and Mr. Clayfield stated that the existing pipe had been considerably affected by corrosion. Humphrey Davy was asked for an opinion, and an analysis of the water showed that there was no iron in it and that iron pipes could be used.[141]

The lease held by Powell ran out early in 1822, and in April the Society advertised the new premises. In July a lease for 5 years was granted to Francis Moreton.[142] The new building was not entirely satisfactory, a smoky chimney gave a good deal of trouble, and £45 10s. had to be spent on alterations, part of which was deducted from Seward's account for £323 7s.[143] Moreton's lease expired in September 1827 and the Hall advertised for a new tenant. Philip Weeks of Lamplighters' Hall agreed to take the premises for a year for a rent of £150, with the option of taking on a new lease after a year at £200 p.a. He was recommended to establish a new scale of charges approved by the Hall.[144] By August 1828, Weeks was dead, and his brother-in-law Daniel Pugh agreed to take a 7 year lease from 29 September.[145] By October 1830, Pugh was £200 in arrears, and the Hall agreed that in recent times receipts had not been equal to expenses. Pugh was allowed to continue for a year at £100 rent, and half of his debt was remitted. Mr. Dyer, who had recently made a survey, was asked to submit proposals for alterations.[146]

The unhappy business dragged on. By January 1834, Pugh was £300 in arrears and the Society decided to arrange a surrender of the lease. Pugh was to give a promissory note, and his offer to continue as manager was turned down.[147] A new lease for three years was granted on 25 March 1834 to Charles Frederick Herbert. He was to pay £75 per annum for the first two years and £100 for the third. He was to decorate the premises, and £25 was to be remitted from his first year's rent if he spent that amount in advertising.[148]

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[140] *H.B.15*, p. 135, 20 Feb. 1821; p. 137, 6 March 1821, pp. 145, 146, 3 April 1821; p. 151, 24 April 1821; p. 156, 18 May 1821; p. 189, 8 Nov. 1821; p. 200, 5 Dec. 1821; p. 217, 20 Feb. 1822. The old Hotwell House was taken down in 1822 when the new Bridge Valley Road to Clifton was constructed (Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 100).

[141] *H.B.15*, p. 171, 8 Aug. 1821; p. 172, 16 Aug. 1821; p. 176, 25 Sept. 1821.

[142] Society's Deeds, box 12, bdle. 19, 6 July 1822; *H.B.15*, p. 239, 4 July 1822.

[143] *H.B.15*, p. 293, 7 Jan. 1823.

[144] *H.B.16*, p. 205, 25 May 1827; p. 227, 20 Aug. 1827; p. 239, 21 Sept. 1827.

[145] Society's Deeds, box 12, bdle. 19, 29 Sept. 1828; *H.B.16*, p. 288, 15 Aug. 1828.

[146] *H.B.16*, p. 411, 1 Oct. 1830.

It seems that at this time the inhabitants of Bristol had been deprived of their right to get Hotwell water free for their own use. In 1834, Joseph Russell asked for the return of the money he had paid during the last seven years, on the ground that citizens were entitled to water if they sent jars marked with their own names. The Society replied firmly that it did not recognise any such right, but three years later when legal action was threatened, it agreed that there was such a right and that a pump should be erected near the river if this could be done at reasonable cost.[149]

Meanwhile, there was more trouble over the lease. In January 1836, Herbert was 1¾ years in arrears. He complained about lack of patronage and wanted to terminate the lease. The Society refused to agree. If he paid his arrears, he could have a new agreement. In April, it was learnt that he had decamped, taking his furniture except for goods which had been distrained for £18. The rest had been sold to Mr. Moses Almain who was not willing to hand over the money. Moreover, Herbert had left a man in possession of the premises who would not surrender the premises unless the Society abandoned its demand for arrears. The Clerk was instructed to recover possession by ejectment and to try to come to terms with Mr. Almain[150] In June, the Master reported that he and Claxton had met Mr. Almain who had acted in good faith and who could not be asked to make good any loss. The Clerk stated that Herbert had sailed in the *Nile* for New York with his wife, his mother and sister-in-law and two children. The passages had been booked in fictitious names. Steps were taken to recover possession of the Hotwell. Two years later, the Clerk reported that Herbert had returned and had been arrested for arrears of £164 14s. 3d., but that he would probably take advantage of the Insolvent Debtors Act. He contracted jail fever, and although the Society agreed to his temporary release, he died in prison.[151]

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[147] *H.B.17*, p. 198, 10 Jan. 1834.

[148] *H.B.17*, p. 218, 2 April 1834; Society's Deeds, box 12, bdle. 19, 25 March 1834.

[149] *H.B.17*, p. 228, 7 May 1834; Vincent Waite, *The Bristol Hotwell*, p. 12; *H.B.18*, p. 50, 19 April 1837. A few months later there were complaints about the muddy state of the water at the public pump lately erected and an investigation was ordered (*H.B.18*, p. 89, 30 Aug. 1837).

[150] *H.B.17*, p. 386, 20 April 1836.

[151] *H.B.17*, p. 395, 11 May 1836; p. 397, 8 June 1836; pp. 414, 415, Aug. 10 1836; *H.B.18*, p. 217, 3 Aug. 1838; p. 247, 12 Oct. 1838.

There were unsuccessful negotiations for a new lease at £75 a year, and in April 1836 the Standing Committee recommended that the premises should be sold by auction on a 99 year lease for three lives. The reserve price was fixed at £950, but the auction did not result in a sale.[152]

In March 1838, a new lease was granted to Mrs. Jane Tutton at £45 a year.[153] In 1843, she asked that a new pump and other machinery should be installed, and the Hall agreed to do this if her rent was increased to £55 a year.[154] She apparently accepted, but made further complaints in 1845 and 1846. The engine was not providing enough water and the tide water was getting in. Consequently, she was in arrears with her rent.[155] The Society got a report on the state of the Hotwell which showed that her complaints were justified, that the vapour baths needed alteration and that the water closets were out of order, but it was reluctant to spend more money and considered the possibility of another tenancy at a reduced rent.[156] Marmont reported that if the Hotwell were to be converted to private use, the cost would be high, and Mrs. Tutton was willing to carry on if her rent were reduced to £45 and if the Society spent £40 on the pump.[157]

In 1851, a 21 year lease was granted to Mr. James Bolton. The Society agreed to him making a shop on each side of the Pump Room and lent him £150 for the purpose at 6 per cent. It refused to lend him another £150 to make a swimming bath, but he nevertheless installed one, and in November in view of the improvements, particularly the "tepid swimming bath", it lent him £200 at 5 per cent.[158] Bolton was successful for a time and sold a variety of goods at the Hotwell.[159] In 1855, he offered to buy the premises on a long lease for £900, but the Society rejected his offer.[160] Possibly he was not sound financially, because a few months later he asked for a loan of £450, which was refused. However, the Society did agree to postpone for six months the rent then due and for another six months the rent due on 29 September 1855.[161]

Bolton eventually got into heavy arrears and the Society forgave him his debt. There was clearly no profit to be made out of the

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[152] *H.B.17*, p. 445, 26 Oct. 1836; *H.B.18*, p. 50, 19 April 1837; p. 102, 12 Sept. 1837; p. 106, 6 Oct. 1837.

[153] *H.B.18*, p. 163, 14 March 1838; Society's Deeds, box 12, bdle. 19.

[154] *H.B.19*, p. 341, 28 April 1843; p. 346, 26 May 1843; p. 358, 9 June 1843.

[155] *H.B.20*, p. 133, 18 July 1845; p. 237, 8 July 1846; p. 246, 14 Aug. 1846.

[156] *H.B.20*, pp. 249, 253–4, 11 Sept. 1846.

[157] *H.B.20*, p. 302, 23 April 1847.

[158] *H.B.21*, p. 145, 20 June 1851; Society's Deeds, box 12, bdle. 19. 27 Sept. 1851; *H.B.21*, p. 209, 9 Jan. 1852.

[159] Vincent Waite, *The Bristol Hotwell*, p. 12.

[160] *H.B.21*, p. 467, 30 March 1855.

[161] *H.B.21*, p. 507, 3 Aug. 1855.

Hotwell, and the Society was glad of the opportunity of disposing of it to the Corporation when it decided to improve navigation on the Avon by removing Hotwell Point. The Pump Room and other buildings were demolished in 1867.[162]

THE SOCIETY'S QUARRIES

The Society owned a number of quarries on its Clifton estate, and these were in considerable demand owing to building development and the need for stone to make roads. The arrangements for leasing these quarries and the problems arising from their working are mentioned continually in the Society's records, but only a few illustrations can be given here.[163] In 1817, for example, a number of quarries were let by auction at annual rents amounting to £275 a year,[164] and next year the Commissioners for Pitching and Paving were offered Honeypen Hill Quarry at £105 a year.[165] In 1831, John Loudon McAdam on behalf of the Turnpike Commissioners rented a quarry for £50 a year.[166] Nine years later, quarries 5, 6, 7, and 8 near the river brought in a combined annual rent of £180.[167] In 1871, part of the quarry near the gully on Durdham Down was let for £150 a year.[168] In 1884, a contractor offered £350 a year and a royalty of 4d. a ton on quantities over 24,000 tons a year for the lease of a quarry near Proctor's Fountain on Clifton Down, and the Society was prepared to agree if the reserved rent was £400 a year.[169] As late as 1894, the quarries under Clifton Down were being offered at a rent of £175 a year and a royalty on anything taken in excess of 10,000 tons.[170]

Although the quarries were a valuable source of income and important for building development in Clifton, they presented a number of problems. In 1813, for example, it was reported that those near Hotwells were a serious threat to the river owing to rocks rolling into the mud and also damaging the tow-paths. It was necessary to stop using four of the quarries.[171] There was also the risk of damaging neighbouring property. In 1830, for example, there was a dispute about whether subsidence at Honeypen Hill was due to quarrying or to a sudden thaw, and later there was some trouble with the Rev. Mr. Edgworth who had purchased the land on which the Roman Catholic pro-Cathedral was subsequently built.[172] In July 1847, McAdam gave notice to quit No. 1. quarry at Hotwells because the magistrate would not let him blast there owing to the danger to the public,[173] and in 1884 it was reported that large pieces of rock continued to fall on the Port and Pier Railway from a disused quarry near the new Zig-Zag. This problem was overcome by agreeing to let a man work the quarry at a rent of £150 on a two year lease.[174]

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[162] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 262. On 25 Sept. 1866, the Society granted the Corporation several pieces of land, messuages, counting house, workshops, gardens, rocks, baths, and pumps (Society's Deeds, box 12, bdle. 19).

[163] For quarry leases, see the Society's *Register of Deeds No. 2*, pp. 431 ff. For the quarries on Clifton and Durdham Downs, see List of Plans, no. 29.

[164] *H.B.14*, p. 458, 7 Nov. 1817.

[165] *H.B.14*, p. 473, 9 Feb. 1818; p. 478, 3 March 1818.

[166] *H.B.17*, p. 73, 14 Dec. 1831.

[167] *H.B.19*, p. 41, 23 Oct. 1840.

[168] *H.B.25*, p. 42, 10 March 1871. The rent was raised to £175 in 1876, but the Society declined to renew the lease in 1878 as it did not want any more quarrying on that part of the Down (*H.B.26*, p. 75, 29 Sept. 1876; p. 174, 26 April 1878).

[169] *H.B.27*, p. 65, 25 July 1884.

[170] *H.B.28*, p. 92, 21 Dec. 1894.

[171] *H.B.14*, p. 250, 23 June 1813.

LAND OUTSIDE BRISTOL

Throughout the nineteenth century the Society was very much concerned with the management of property outside Bristol which it owned in its own right or which it administered as a charity trustee. A detailed history of its estate management would be out of place here, but some comment and illustration is necessary, since it involved a great deal of work for the officers and for Standing Committee.

The main estates were in Somerset, and they included Locking and Beere, which belonged to the Colston Charity, and Monkton at Stogursey, which the Society believed it held in its own right.[175] In addition, the Charity estate included ground rents in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Dorset and elsewhere, and after the reorganisation of the Colston Charity in the eighteen-sixties, the Society purchased an estate at Stapleton, part of it for Colston's Hospital and part for the Society's own use.[176] In the eighteen-sixties, it also invested some of its own money in estates in Somerset known as Farm, Cathanger and Coultings.[177]

References to the management of the estates appear continually in the Hall Books, and a few examples will show the kind of problems that arose. In 1811, for example, a man rebuilt part of the sea-wall at Combwich in a way which left a section of the Society's wall in danger. The Clerk was instructed to take the matter up with the Commissioners of Sewers at Bridgwater, and in the end the man was ordered to rebuild on the old line.[178] In 1813, the presentation of Locking was auctioned for £665.[179] Three years later, there was trouble when Mr. Reeves, who was employed by the Society as receiver of rents in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Dorset, was in default on money owing to the crown and was also about £200 in debt to the Society.[180]

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[172] *H.B.16*, p. 378, 5 March 1830; p. 382, 16 April 1830; *H.B.17*, pp. 389, 390, 20 April 1836; p. 394, 11 May 1836; p. 418, 17 Aug. 1836.

[173] *H.B.20*, p. 314, 9 July 1847.

[174] *H.B.27*, p. 40, 25 Jan. 1884; p. 46, 29 Feb. 1884.

[175] See p. 365–70. [176] See p. 371. [177] See p. 355–6.

[178] *H.B.14*, p. 161, 25 Sept. 1811; p. 164, 8 Nov. 1811; p. 259, 29 Oct. 1813.

[179] *H.B.14*, p. 259, 29 Oct. 1813.

At the annual inspection of the estates in 1822, everything was found to be in excellent order, and it was decided to give a piece of plate to the value of £100 to Mr. Haynes who managed the estates for the Society. There were, however, complaints from the tenant about the low price of provisions and requests for a reduction of rents. Stogursey Church, which had received liberal help from the Society, was reported to be very neat, and the tower had been repaired at a cost of £744.[181]

In 1831, the lease of Stogursey, which was held from Eton College, came up for renewal, and the College wanted a renewal fine of £1,000. There was more hard bargaining when the College wanted £1,054 for renewal in 1838, and the Society offered £800. The fine was eventually settled at £950.[182]

During Claxton's energetic treasurership, the visit of the Standing Committee to the estates were recorded in great detail in his Journal as well as in the Hall Books. Thus, in July 1842, the Master and Standing Committee went to view the estate at Locking and afterward dined at the Royal Hotel, the total cost being £20 6s. 8d. Next month, they travelled by rail to Bridgwater to visit Beere and Stogursey. They stayed the night at Bridgwater, and the total cost was £39 7s. 6d.[183] After a visit to the Stogursey farms in 1844, the Treasurer's detailed report included the respectful suggestion that the pigsties at one of the farms should be removed and placed in a convenient position at the back of the house.[184]

These annual inspections no doubt helped to maintain standards, and they also served as pleasant outings for members of the Committee. Thus, Claxton noted of a visit in 1867 that after passing through Farm, they had another "liquor up", as the weather was very hot and thirsty. At Beere Farm, they had expected to find luncheon, but were disappointed as "the old girls, Mr. Fisher's aged sisters were too stingy". However, they had another "liquor up" and walked to the station.[185] The Somerest lands also provided shooting facilities in the patronage of the Master. On one occasion, the tenant of Beere Farm was accused of "very gross language and insulting conduct" to the Master's nominee and was required to make an ample apology.[186]

[180] *H.B.14*, p. 381, 13 June 1816.

[181] *H.B.15*, p. 270, 8 Nov. 1822.

[182] *H.B.17*, pp. 52, 53, 9 Sept. and 7 Oct. 1831; *H.B.18*, p. 238, 12 Sept. 1838; p. 244, 12 Oct. 1838; p. 249, 18 Oct. 1838.

[183] *Claxton's Journal 1*, p. 69, 20 July 1842; p. 70, 2 Aug. 1842.

[184] *H.B.19*, p. 453, 30 May 1844.

[185] *Claxton's Journal* 11, pp. 89 ff., 13 July 1867.

[186] *H.B.23*, p. 297, 18 Sept. 1863.

In 1850, Claxton's salary was increased by £150 but at the same time he was required in future to collect the rents from the Society's estates instead of this being done by a land agent. The Finance Committee thought that one of the advantages would be that it could be done "without any increased cost",[187] but in the privacy of his Journal, Claxton remarked bitterly that he would in future have four times as much work and that over half his increased salary would have to go to pay a clerk.[188]

Changes in farming methods and fluctuations in farm prices are reflected from time to time in the records. Thus, Claxton noted in 1847 that one of the tenants was an intelligent man who had introduced "implemental Husbandry" to a greater extent than had hitherto been known in that part of Somerset.[189] In 1871, Mr. Stoate of Farm wrote to the Society stating that "As Agriculture is so much aided by Machinery of which Farm is deficient . . . I shall be glad as this is such a large tillage Farm if you will kindly help me to move on with the modern style of farming by putting up Machinery for thrashing, cutting chaff, pulping roots and grinding corn for stock, as I do not know one Farm in Somerset as large as this without such Machinery." He wanted about £250 for building and about the same amount for machinery. Eventually, he got £300 for new building and up to £200 for any further outlay, provided he would pay 5 per cent on the amount over £300.[190]

Whenever agriculture was in difficulties, there were demands for reductions in rent. In 1844, for example, after visiting the estates, the Treasurer reported that the tenants could not pay because of low prices, and the Hall agreed to abate rents at Stogursey, Beere and Locking by 10 per cent.[191] In 1880, Stogursey tenants complained that the 15 per cent reduction which they had received was not enough, and the Hall increased it to 20 per cent.[192] There were similar problems on a number of other occasions in the last twenty years of the century.[193]

As far as one can judge on limited evidence, the Society treated its tenants reasonably. Thus, when the tenant of Cathanger was asked for an increased rent in 1862, he replied that he was unable to pay it and was given notice to quit at Michaelmas. He complained that this was very short notice and that it was "quite contrary to the

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[187] *H.B.21*, p. 81, 11 Oct. 1850.

[188] *Claxton's Journal 1*, p. 152, 2 Nov. 1850.

[189] *Claxton's Journal 1*, p. 124, 14 July 1847. Mr. Mason at Wrenmore.

[190] *H.B.25*, pp. 70 ff., 7 July 1871; p. 79, 14 Aug. 1871.

[191] *H.B.20*, p. 21, 13 Sept. 1844.

[192] *H.B.26*, p. 305, 21 May 1880; p. 367, 23 Sept. 1881.

[193] *H.B.27*, p. 35, 31 Dec. 1883; p. 38, 25 Jan. 1884; p. 47, 11 March 1884; p. 460, 30 Dec. 1892; *H.B.28*, p. 35, 27 Oct. 1893; pp. 179, 180, 25 July 1896; p. 193, 27 Nov. 1896; p. 197, 18 Dec. 1896.

Societys practice to deal fairly with their Tenants". His tenancy was extended for another 12 months.[194]

As has already been noted, the Society purchased an estate at Stapleton in the eighteen-sixties.[195] In addition, it made other acquisitions which were the special concern of William Claxton. In 1861, he urged the Society to buy an estate of about 400 acres known as Farm between Beere and Monkton, and the Society took possession in June of that year.[196] A year later, Claxton and John Hellicar visited another estate of 126 acres known as Cathanger which was rented for £195 and which could be bought for £5,000.[197] The Hall confirmed the purchase on 26 April 1862.[198] Another farm of 72 acres known as Coultings was bought in 1865 for £4,308 6s. 10d.[199] and 12 acres at Fiddington were added to the Farm-Cathanger estate in 1870.[200] Claxton was clearly getting great enjoyment out of land purchases, and in a letter recommending the acquisitions, he remarked "referring you to the last Cartoon in Punch I guess I am like the American President in 'Compound Addition' not of debt however but of Property, and like the Emperor of the French also in 'Reduction of debt'."[201]

When Claxton urged these investments in agricultural land in the eighteen-sixties, he could not foresee the difficulties to be encountered by agriculture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By 1882, the Society was seriously considering selling land. The Treasurer reported in that year that the Farm-Cathanger lands had cost the Society £17,356, that £3,729 4s. had been spent on new buildings and £1,734 on drainage. Average annual net receipts had been £522 after deductions for management, so that return on capital had been 2¾ per cent. On Coultings, the return on capital of £4,308 6s. 10d. had been 2½ per cent. On a capital expenditure of £26,763 on the three estates, the average annual return was only £633. Moreover, the tenant of Coultings had given notice to quit unless his rent was reduced, and other tenants were likely to follow suit.[202] The Society decided that it was not expedient to sell,[203] but in view of the agricultural depression, it was no doubt glad that much of its capital was in urban property in Bristol.

[194] *H.B.23*, pp. 228, 229, 8 Aug. 1892.

[195] See p. 282 n. 10.

[196] *Claxton's Journal 1*, pp. 224, 225, 15 Feb. 1861, 6 June 1861.

[197] *Ibid.*, p. 231, 10 Feb. 1862; *H.B.23*, pp. 191 ff., 14 Feb. 1861.

[198] *Claxton's Journal 1*, p. 232, 26 April 1862. The Society was in funds owing to the sale of land in Clifton, and the Treasurer reported that he could pay off £2,000 raised on bond connection with Farm and also another £2,000 bonds.

[199] *H.B.24*, p. 42, 17 Nov. 1865.

[200] See *H.B.26*, p. 416, 28 April 1882.

[201] *H.B.23*, p. 195, 14 Feb. 1861

[202] *H.B.26*, p. 416, 28 April 1882.

[203] *H.B.26*, p. 420, 6 May 1882. By 1896, the rent of Farm and Cathanger was down to £380 p.a. (*H.B.28*, p. 197, 18 Dec. 1896).

It would be possible to add a great deal to this survey of the Society's management of its property in the nineteenth century, and in particular to work out in greater detail the major contribution which it made to the development of its urban property in Clifton, Hotwells and other parts of Bristol. This aspect of its work was of growing concern to it as the city expanded rapidly in the nineteenth century, and although the Society occasionally made unfortunate investments such as the Hotwell and nearly became involved in what would have been a major disaster with its Waterworks Scheme,[204] it nevertheless benefited very considerably from the efforts which it made to develop its urban land. It was, as a result, in a position to devote a considerable amount of money to the charitable and educational activities which became of increasing importance to it in the second half of the nineteenth century.

[204] This important attempt to develop the Society's property is more conveniently considered elsewhere. See pp. 413–26.

CHAPTER 20

The Society and Education in the Nineteenth Century

AT the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Society was responsible for Colston's Hospital and for its own School under the Hall, both of which gave elementary education to poor children. In the course of the next hundred years, the educational work of the Society underwent radical transformation. Colston's Hospital ceased to be restricted to teaching a few basic subjects to boys in humble circumstances as a preparation for apprenticeship, and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College at its highest levels was rivalling University College, Bristol. The development of education had come to be one of the main concerns of a Society which was no longer involved with commerce and the port.[1]

THE MERCHANTS' HALL SCHOOL

There are not many references to the school under the Hall in the early nineteenth century, but it still went on.[2] On 8 November 1811, Edmund Sheriff was appointed master and his salary was increased by £10 to make it £50 per annum. In 1814, the Hall bought for the school certain mathematical instruments and charts, and next year the master's salary was raised to £65. When Edmund Sheriff died in 1816, his son was appointed in his place, and his salary was raised to £80 in 1819. Two years later, a sextant and azimuth compass were purchased. George Mitchell became master in 1836, but by 1839 the school was in a bad way. A committee reported that it was inefficient, and the Hall decided to amalgamate its school with another school for teaching navigation which was being run by the Bristol Marine Society. The Hall appointed Lieutenant Kemball, master of the Marine Society's school, to be master of its school in King Street at £80 a year, and agreed to provide him with room, coal and candles. The Marine Society undertook to continue its subscriptions, and as long as they amounted to £40 a year, it could nominate one third of the pupils. There were to be classes for adults as well as for youths, and adults were to pay 3 guineas each, one third of which went to the master. The number of students to be admitted was 50, and there was a joint management committee. There were five classes – reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar and geography, and, if required, an elementary class in navigation. Books and instruments were to be provided in the senior classes.

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[1] For a very detailed treatment of the subject, see D. J. Eames, "The Contribution of the Society of Merchant Venturers to the Development of Education in Bristol", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis, 1966.

[2] Merchants' Hall: two envelopes containing papers relating to the Merchants' Hall Marine School including "Some Account of the Merchants' Hall School" and "Constitution and Regulation of the Merchants' Hall Marine School". See also *H.B.14*, p. 165, 8 Nov. 1811; p. 166, 8 Nov. 1811; p. 321, 8 Nov. 1814; p. 339, 18 April 1815; *H.B.15*, p. 12, 5 Aug. 1819; p. 131, 2 Jan. 1821; *H.B.17*, p. 292, 11 Feb. 1835; p. 406, 6 July 1836; *H.B.18*, p. 304, 8 Feb. 1839.

The union was not successful and did not last long. In 1844, a committee found that only three boys were being instructed in navigation and that two of these were determined not to go to sea. It recommended the end of the association with the Bristol Marine Society and the establishment of a new system for the Hall's school. In future it was to teach nothing but mathematics, navigation and related subjects, and no one should be admitted unless he could read and write. Thus there came to an end, in theory at least, the elementary school, and it was replaced by a navigation school. A master was to be appointed to teach in the room under the Hall, and the Society was to provide coal, stationery, books, charts and instruments. The master was to have £50 a year, which included £25 for teaching not more than 20 boys at Colston's Hospital mathematics and navigation. The Society was to supplement his salary by additional payments based on the number of pupils and the period of their attendance.[3] The Marine Society, through its Chairman W. D. Wills, did not agree with the proposals, but the Society saw no reason to change its decision.[4] The first master was appointed in October 1844 and the rules were finally approved in December.[5]

There was difficulty in getting pupils, and in 1853 a new set of rules was drawn up and efforts were made to give the school more publicity.[6] In 1859, the master, David Mackie, suggested various alterations in teaching methods, and some changes were made in hours of attendance.[7]

When the master died in 1863, the Society appointed a sub-committee which reported that the Merchants' Hall School was not achieving its objectives. It pointed out that schools for navigation in London and other ports were attached to Trade Schools under the Department of Science and Art. When a Trade and Mining School had been established in Bristol in 1856, Professor Playfair had wanted to include in it a Marine Department, but had found the ground already occupied by the Society's School. The sub-committee had contacted the Department of Science and Art which had sent a representative to Bristol to discuss the matter. The report expressed the view that it was worth trying the experiment of combining the Society's Marine School with the Trade and Mining School. That school was to recommend to the Society a master in navigation at a salary of £50 a year, half of which was to be paid by the Society, and the Society was to have the right to nominate 10 boys to the Marine Department of the Trade and Mining School. They were to be known as Merchants' Hall Boys. The navigation master was to be on the staff of the Trade School, which was to provide a room to be called The Society of Merchant Venturers' Marine School. The Society was to equip it with charts and instruments and to provide £10 a year for its upkeep. The Master, Wardens and Treasurer together with the committee of the Trade School were to be the managers of the Marine Department. Classes were to be arranged for adults as well as for boys.[8] By this arrangement the Society brought to an end the school under the Hall and transferred it to the Trade and Mining School, but continued to carry out its obligations under the trusts by providing for the teaching of navigation.

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[3] *H.B.19*, p. 409, 12 Jan. 1844; papers relating to the Marine School, Report of Sub-Committee, 22 Feb. 1844; *H.B.20*, pp. 13 f., 20 Aug. 1844; p. 23, 13 Sept. 1844.

[4] *H.B.19*, p. 439, 12 April 1844.

[5] *H.B.20*, p. 36, 18 Oct. 1844; pp. 81 ff., 13 Dec. 1844. D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–7. There were 10 applicants. Hugh Babb, a retired Master in the Royal Navy, was appointed and held the post for 9 years. The school was open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only, presumably in order to give the master time to teach at Colston's Hospital.

[6] *H.B.21*, pp. 286, 287, 14 Jan. 1853; p. 352, 9 Dec. 1853.

[7] *H.B.22*, p. 348, 13 May 1859; p. 350, 10 June 1859.

The new Navigation School was not successful. In 1865 a committee reported that it had not fulfilled its expectations. Arthur James Gayne had been appointed master in 1863 at £100 a year, half of it paid by the Trade and Mining School, but there had seldom been any applications for places, and it had been decided that the master should be allowed to act on his own, provided he continued to instruct at least 10 boys nominated by the Hall. There had never been half that number at any one time, and Gayne had resigned to take a post at Gosport. The connection with the Trade and Mining School had thus proved "fatuous". However, the Local Marine Board was now willing to re-establish and encourage the school, and cooperation with the Board seemed the most hopeful prospect.[9] In July 1865, William Charles Seeton was appointed master at £80 a year, undertaking to teach at least 10 boys the art of navigation.[10]

Four years later, the Society's Visiting Committee reported that the objects of the school as originally constituted had entirely failed owing to the abolition of compulsory apprenticeship on merchant vessels. It proposed that the Local Marine Board and the committee of the Sailors' Home should be invited to join the Society in supervising the school, which should continue to be free for boys, but which should also prepare adults for the examinations held by the Local Marine Board. The fees were to be 7s. a week, and it was hoped that the school would become self-supporting and useful.[11] Captain John Furzier was appointed master in 1871.[12]

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[8] *H.B.23*, p. 301, 18 Sept. 1863.

[9] *H.B.24*, pp. 5 ff., 3 May 1865.

[10] *H.B.24*, p. 14, 5 July 1865.

In 1878, there was yet another report on the Merchants' Hall Marine School. It had no boys as pupils and the conduct of the few remaining adults was "most objectionable and offensive". It was decided that the school should be closed, and Mr. John Furzier was given notice that his appointment terminated on Lady Day 1879. The £20 which the Society was under obligation to pay to some person skilled in navigation to teach boys in Bristol was to be paid in future to the Governors of the Colston Trust.[13]

COLSTON'S HOSPITAL IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The history of Colston's Hospital has been examined in great detail by Mr. D. J. Eames,[14] and there is no need to include here all the material contained in his invaluable study, but it is necessary to give some indication of what the Society did in relation to the Hospital and to make a number of comments, particularly with regard to the legal dispute in which the Society was involved in in the eighteen-forties.

Until 1836, the Hospital seems to have continued very much on its eighteenth-century lines under the headmastership of Mr. Haynes, who also acted as the Society's Receiver of Rents in Bristol and Clifton. His salary was raised from £50 to £100 in 1814 and to £150 in 1818.[15] In addition, owing to the high cost of food during and after the Napoleonic Wars, it was necessary from time to time to increase the amount allowed him for each boy and to make *ad hoc* grants to meet immediate necessities.[16] A Visiting Committee examined the Hospital from time to time and dealt with disciplinary and other problems. In 1816, for example, there was a complaint from a missionary in Newfoundland, forwarded through the Bishop of Bristol and the Mayor, that boys from the Hospital had been apprenticed to Roman Catholic masters in Newfoundland and had become bigoted Roman Catholics.[17] In 1820, it was decided that no boys should be accepted unless he had been vaccinated against smallpox.[18] Five years later, there was typhus in the school and steps were taken to deal with it.[19] In 1836, there was trouble with Colston's Nominees who complained that the Society had allowed the British Association to use part of the Hospital during its visit to Bristol and thus deprived the boys of the use of it for a considerable time. The Hall replied with dignity that it thought it in the interests of the city and of Science that so eminent a body should not be prejudiced by want of accommodation and that the deviation from the terms of the Trust was "a deviation which the peculiar urgency of the occasion and the importance of the public Interests concerned appeared to justify."[20]

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[11] *H.B.24*, pp. 366 ff., 27 Oct. 1869.

[12] *H.B.25*, p. 58, 9 June 1871.

[13] *H.B.26*, p. 225, 19 Dec. 1878. These Trustees had in 1875 taken over Colston's Hospital and also the Trade and Mining School (see pp. 374, 375–6).

[14] See Note 1 *supra*.

[15] *H.B.14*, p. 315, 8 Nov. 1814; p. 518, 19 Nov. 1818.

[16] *H.B.13*, p. 138, 29 May 1800; *H.B.14*, p. 143, 5 Dec. 1810; p. 315, 8 Nov. 1814. The allowance per boy was reduced to £15 in 1822, but restored to £18 in 1825 (*H.B.15*, p. 275, 8 Nov. 1822; *H.B.16*, p. 60, 3 June 1825).

Until 1836 there were no changes of any importance in the education provided, which consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic and instruction in the catechism of the Church of England. In this, the Society was simply carrying out the wishes of the Founder, Edward Colston. The headmaster, Mr. Haynes, must have been increasingly busy with his work as Receiver of Rents in Clifton and Bristol, and was unlikely to be an innovator on any scale.

In 1836, there were great changes. In the first place, Mr. Haynes, who had been headmaster for over 50 years, decided to retire owing to heart trouble,[21] and Mr. John Lewis was appointed in his place.[22] In the same year a new and much stronger management committee, including the Master and the Treasurer, replaced the former Visiting Committee.[23]

The appointment of a headmaster who could give all his time to the Hospital and the establishment of a stronger management committee may in some measure have been a response to challenges from outside. The role of central government was becoming of increasing importance and Parliament was showing an inconvenient interest in the administration of charities and educational trusts. In 1818, for example, Henry Brougham's committee began to enquire into the education of the lower orders and asked for information about Colston's Hospital.[24] The Whig reformers in the eighteen-thirties not only reformed the Corporation and the Bristol charities but even attempted to pry into the affairs of the Society itself. In November 1836, a special meeting of the Hall was called to consider a request from the Charity Commissioners that the Society should produce all the Minute Books and financial records relating to Colston's Hospital and hand them over for examination.[25] It was not surprising, therefore, that from 1836 the Hall was increasingly concerned with the management and with the educational system of Colston's Hospital, and that there were major changes, some of which can be noted.[26]

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[17] *H.B.14*, p. 405, 19 Oct. 1816. The headmaster said he knew of only one case, a boy apprenticed to a respectable merchant of Bristol who had sent him to be apprenticed in Newfoundland in 1813. The headmaster said he did not know the Newfoundland merchant was a Roman Catholic. In another case, he had refused to allow a boy to be sent to Newfoundland to a Roman Catholic.

[18] *H.B.15*, p. 109, 2 Nov. 1820.

[19] *H.B.16*, p. 12, 7 Jan. 1825.

[20] *H.B.17*, p. 418, 17 Aug. 1836; p. 429, 5 Oct. 1836.

[21] *H.B.17*, pp. 413 ff., 10 Aug. 1836.

[22] *H.B.17*, pp. 426, 427, 12 Sept. 1836 (21 applications); *H.B.17*, p. 443, 26 Oct. 1836.

[23] *H.B.17*, p. 448, 8 Nov. 1836. It was a sub-committee of the Standing Committee. It kept its own minutes. See *Colston's Hospital Visiting Committee*, 4 volumes, covering the years 1836 to 1875. For other records, see D. J. Eames, *op. cit.* (note 1 *supra*).

One of the most important reforms was recommended by the Standing Committee in 1836 when it proposed that the system by which the headmaster received a grant for every boy out of which he provided food and clothing should be replaced experimentally for one year by the Society itself taking over responsibility for food and clothing.[27] The new system apparently worked well,[28] and it removed from the headmaster any temptation to make a profit at the expense of the boys. It was possibly to compensate him for any loss that his salary was increased from 150 guineas to 200 guineas in 1839.[29]

John Lewis was headmaster from 1836 until his dismissal in 1848, and during his headmastership steps were taken to improve the comfort and education of the boys.[30] Lewis investigated what was being done at Christ's Hospital and other charity schools, and the committee recommended a new and more varied diet. It found the education in the Hospital had been more varied but in some ways inferior to that given in parochial schools, and a new, more general system was recommended with useful and amusing books. There was to be more recreation and more holidays, and it was hoped that eventually corporal punishment could be abolished. Some boys were found to be sleeping three to a bed, and 14 new beds were purchased.[31]

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[24] *H.B.14*, p. 486, 19 May 1818.

[25] *H.B.18*, p. 1, 23 Nov. 1836. For the sequel, see p. 365 ff.

[26] For further details, see D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, chapter 3, "Colston's Hospital in the First Half of the Nineteenth century".

[27] *H.B.17*, p. 432, 5 Oct. 1836.

[28] *H.B.18*, pp. 387, 389, 8 Nov. 1839.

[29] *H.B.18*, p. 375, 29 Oct. 1839.

[30] It is only fair to add that something had already been done to improve the education as a result of a report from Mr. Haynes in 1830 (see D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 65 ff.

In 1839, the Visiting Committee drew up a list of books for a school library and the Hall made an initial grant of £25,[32] and in 1843 a "plunging bath" was installed to take 15 boys at a time.[33] Mr. Eames notes that from 1836 onwards there is little mention of crime in the records and many references to extension of the curriculum, welfare, medical attention, rewards and outings.[34] In 1841, for example, the Visiting Committee recommended a "System of Rewards", and boys who left with a good testimonial were to receive a bible and a Book of Common Prayer.[35] In the same year, the Visiting Committee and the catechist, the Rev. George Barrow, reported in lyrical terms on the examination of the boys, and in 1844 the Treasurer, William Claxton, noted that the boys did very well when the Standing Committee examined them in catechism, scripture and history. He added "and didn't they all tuck into a good lunch provided by the Treasurer".[36] Next year, the Bishop of Bristol expressed "his marked appreciation of the devout behaviour of the Candidates at confirmation at Marshfield".[37] Another exercise in public relations took place in June 1845 when the boys were examined for the first time in the Hall in the presence of the Mayor and Sheriff, the Duke of Beaufort, E. F. Colston and some of the Nominees. According to the report on the school, every one was very pleased and the occasion had the desired effect of producing "emulation amongst the Boys" and, it was hoped, "of inducing higher tones of religious and moral feeling".[38]

There were, of course, a number of problems, quite apart from the litigation of the eighteen-forties.[39] The right to nominate boys to the Hospital was clearly regarded as an important piece of patronage. Half the boys were supposed to be nominated by the Hall and half by Colston's Nominees. The practice had grown up of each body nominating when a boy whom it had previously nominated left the school, and in the course of time there came to be more Nominees' boys than Merchant Venturers' boys. A further complication was that Philip Jones, who had been admitted in 1765, had in 1814 bequeathed £500, the interest from which was to be used to help boys who were subsequently given the number 76. It so happened that all the boys who were given this number were Nominees' boys. The Society took the matter up in 1842, and it was eventually agreed after much argument that in future nominations for No. 76 should be made alternately by the two bodies.[40]

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[31] *H.B.18*, pp. 114–23, 26 Oct. 1837; D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–71.

[32] *H.B.18*, p. 375, 29 Oct. 1839; *Colston's Hospital Visiting Committee*, 8 Nov. 1839; D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 73 ff.

[33] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[35] *H.B.19*, pp. 159, 160, 4 Nov. 1841.

[36] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 100, 6 Nov. 1844. See also D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–5.

[37] *H.B.20*, p. 171, 4 Nov. 1845.

[38] *H.B.20*, p. 172, 4 Nov. 1845. The new Navigation Class was also reported to be very satisfactory.

[39] See pp. 365–70.

There were difficulties, too, with the headmaster, John Lewis. In 1842, he asked the Standing Committee to pay a bill of £4 10s. for some books which, it appeared, he had bought expressly against the wishes of the school committee, and he was reprimanded.[41] Later in the year, Canon Lord William Somerset reported that on 5 November the boys had not attended divine service at the Cathedral as was customary and that the headmaster did not always come to divine service on Saints' Days.[42] At this time, when the Colston Trust was very much in the public eye owing to the action brought by the Attorney-General, the Society was very sensitive to any suggestion that the wishes of the Founder were not being observed and that there was any deviation from his explicit instructions that the boys should be brought up as sound members of the Church of England. Lewis was warned that he would be liable to dismissal if it occurred again.[43] A year later, he was in trouble when there was a complaint that he had attended places of worship other than those of the Church of England. He agreed that he had done so, and as the Hall considered that it was "totally contrary to the spirit of the Founder's settlements that anything approaching Dissent should be connected with the Establishment", he was warned that if he continued to behave in that way, he might be dismissed.[44] In 1845, there was a suggestion that boys had been apprenticed to members of the Church of England who subsequently transferred them to dissenters. Legal opinion was obtained, but no further action was taken.[45] Then, in 1848 the Visiting Committee reported that about fifteen months earlier Lewis had switched the posts of Senior Usher and Junior Usher without telling the committee. The ushers were examined. Lewis admitted the charge but said he had done it for the good of the school and in order not to hurt the feelings of one of the ushers. The Committee was not satisfied with his explanation, and as he had already been twice reprimanded, it recommended his dismissal. He asked the Hall to keep him on or to give him a pension, but both requests were refused.[46] There were 34 applications for his post, and Richard Rowlatt was chosen from a short list of five. He was appointed on 23 June 1848.[47]

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[40] For the original gift, see *H.B.14*, p. 326, 15 Nov. 1815. Part of the interest was used for other purposes. For a long report on the matter, signed by Claxton and Osborne, see *H.B.20*, pp. 44–53, 25 Oct. 1844. Claxton evidently took the matter very seriously. See also Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 290, 291.

[41] *H.B.19*, p. 269, 12 Aug. 1842.

[42] *H.B.19*, p. 313, 10 Nov. 1842.

[43] *H.B.19*, p. 314, 8 Dec. 1822.

[44] *H.B.19*, pp. 386–8, 3 Nov. 1843.

[45] *H.B.20*, p. 187, 12 Dec. 1845. It is not clear whether Lewis was directly involved, although he, of course, would have arranged the original apprenticeships.

At this point it is necessary to leave the history of the Colston Hospital itself in order to examine one of the two traumatic experiences undergone by the Society in the eighteen-forties, the action brought by the Attorney-General concerning the property of the Colston Trust.[48]

THE CASE OF THE COLSTON TRUST

We have already seen that in 1836 a special meeting of the Hall was called to consider a request from the Charity Commissioners that the Society should make available all the records relating to the Colston Charity.[49] The Clerk was ordered to produce the documents but not to let them out of his possession.[50] The Charity Commissioners continued with their investigation, and in 1838 asked the Society to hand over the Duplicate Book with copies of the accounts for 1708–18 which had been missing at the time of their previous visit. The Hall agreed that they should be allowed to have a copy, which was to be made at their expense.[51] As a result of the investigation, in July 1839 the Attorney-General filed a suit against the Society with reference to some of the land of the Charity. The information alleged that the manor of Monkton in Stogursey, Somerset, which the Society held on lease from Eton College, was not in fact held by the Society in its own right but in trust for Colston's Hospital and that the Society must account to the Hospital for all rents and profits received from it.[52]

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[46] *H.B.20*, p. 354, 17 Jan. 1848; p. 355, 18 Jan. 1848; p. 356, 21 Jan. 1848; p. 358, 25 Jan. 1848; p. 380, 26 May 1848. Claxton (*Journal I*, p. 132, 27 Jan. 1848) reported that 15 voted for his dismissal and only, J. E. Lunell, Master at the time of his appointment, voted for him. He was to go on 1 Aug. 1848. Lewis asked for authentic copies of all annual reports on his conduct and efficiency and for authentic copies of his testimonials at the time of appointment. He also asked for his salary to be continued till 29 August. The requests were refused, but his testimonials, if still in existence, were to be returned (*H.B.20*, p. 402, 22 Sept. 1848). In 1937, the Society gave a pension to Miss L. C. Lewis, daughter of a former headmaster of Colston's Hospital (*H.B.33*, p. 59, 27 Oct. 1937).

[47] *H.B.20*, p. 383, 31 May 1848; p. 384, 3 June 1848; p. 389, 23 June 1848 (19 present).

[48] For the second traumatic experience, the Waterworks scheme, see pp. 413–26.

[49] See p. 362.

[50] *H.B.18*, p. 1, 23 Nov. 1836. The difficulty was that much of the material was in books which contained information about other matters, and the Society was extremely secretive about what it regarded as its own business.

[51] *H.B.18*, p. 155, 14 Feb. 1838. In December the Society decided that 200 copies of Colston's Settlement should be printed for distribution to members (*H.B.18*, p. 284, 14 Dec. 1838).

The information came as a great shock to the Society. For William Claxton, it was a wicked radical plot. As he put it, "the nation having become radically hot for Reform, Amongst other Reforms was that of the Municipal Corporations in 1835, and all the charities heretofore under the control of the Corporation of the City of Bristol became vested in a Newly Created Body entitled 'Charity Trustees'. The Liberals who controlled the newly-elected Town Council had offered one half of the seats in the Charity Trustees to the Tories, but they rejected the offer and the Liberals then elected the whole body of the members from among themselves." Claxton went on: "Give a man an Inch and he will take an Ell. These Charity Trustees having all the City Charities wanted more, and determined to set their rapacious claws on Colston's Hospital for being mostly Dissenters from the Church of England themselves, they couldn't abide that so complete a Church going School should not be filled with Radical Boys. Accordingly, having great influence with a Radical Administration they procured a Commission of Enquiry – and then came down a precious Scum of the Earth Mr. Commissioner Eagle, a man whose conduct afterwards became so infamous that he was kicked out of this situation of employment under government by the government itself. However, he did his work here, nearly killing the then excellent Treasurer of the Society, Mr. Joseph Hellicar, by his determined radical worry. Being unable to find fault with the accounts as it respected their keeping for 130 years and as it respected the appropriation of the Charity Funds, he at length discovered the transaction with Col. Bowyer, mentioned above; laid his claws upon Stogursey Manor, declared it was obtained through the Charity Funds and that the Society should at once give it up to the Charity and the £500 received from Bowyer and its interest simple and compound."[53]

Claxton's naive and angry account reflects the deep hostility of

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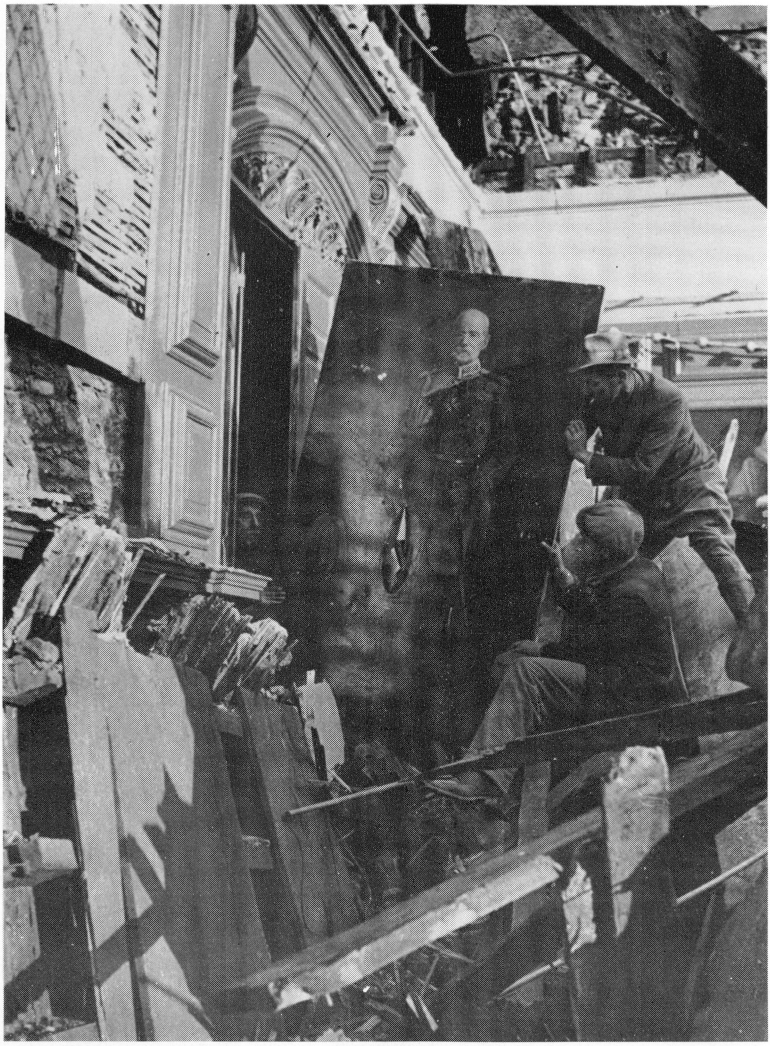
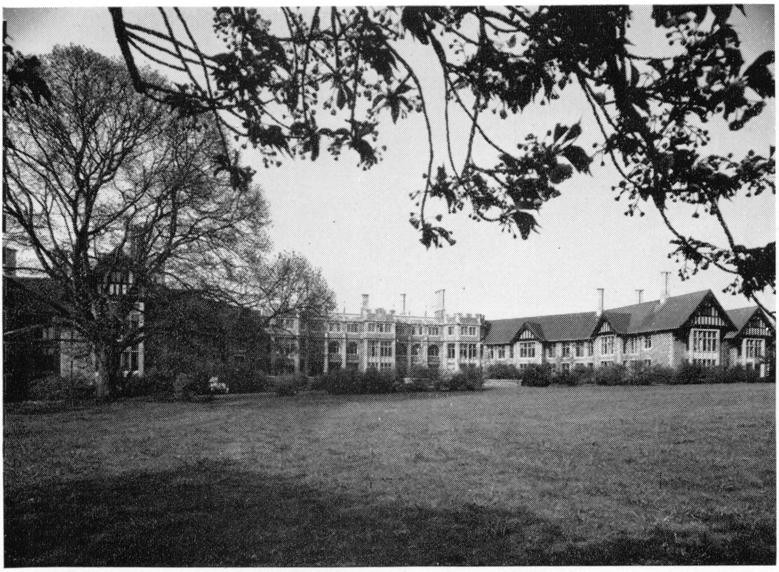
[52] *H.B.18*, p. 356, 9 Aug. 1839. Latimer printed an account of the affair given him by the Treasurer, W. W. Ward, based on the pleadings and legal documents in the possession of the Hall (*Merchant Venturers*, pp. 292–8). The papers in the Society's archives include the Clerk's papers relating to the Chancery case in 1842; a bundle of pleadings in 1842; the judgement of the Master of the Rolls, 1 Aug. 1842; the subsequent discussion in Court about the best means of settling the charity; the Master of the Roll's decree of 1 Aug. 1842; and a volume, apparently made by William Claxton, containing among other items "An Account of the Manor of Monckton as extracted by William Claxton from the Books of Proceedings and its fatal consequences to the Society of Merchant Venturers." This lengthy account includes material up to the time when the Master of the Rolls approved a new scheme for the charity on 18 Dec. 1857. Henceforth, it is referred to as Claxton. *Manor of Monckton.*

[53] See Claxton, *Manor of Monckton.*



Portrait of Lord Roberts being removed from the damaged Hall after an enemy air attack in 1940. From a collection of photographs in the present Hall.

Photograph by G. Kelsey

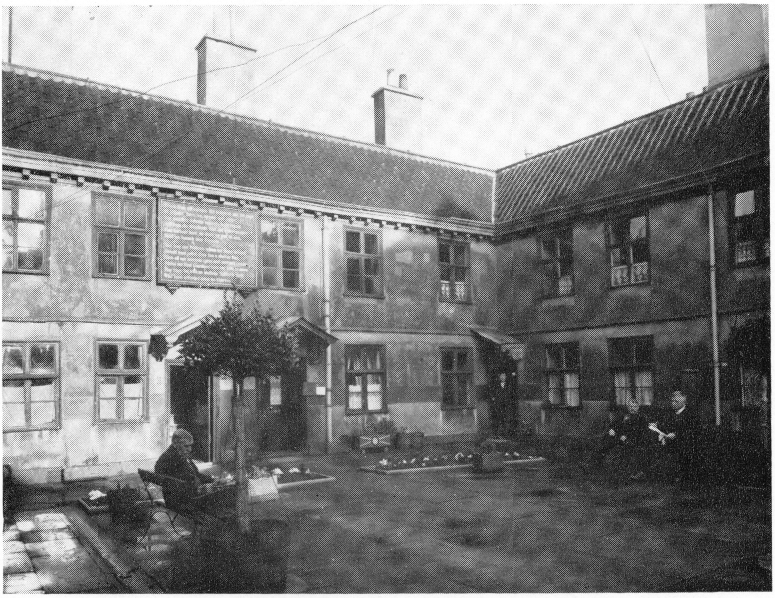


Above: The central forecourt of the St. Monica Home of Rest from Durdham Down.

Photograph by courtesy of Major J. R. H. Parlby

Below: The Merchants' Almshouse, King Street, January 1937

From a photograph in the Merchants' Hall



some of the early Victorian Merchant Venturers to any questioning of their transactions as well as their complete assurance that they were right. The situation was in fact a good deal more complex than Claxton suggested, and it is by no means clear that the Society was as much in the right as Claxton, and, for that matter his successor in the later nineteenth century, W. W. Ward, suggested.[54] To understand the position, it is necessary to examine the way in which the manor of Monkton in Stogursey had come into the Society's hands.

When Edward Colston established his Hospital, he purchased certain estates and ground rents and vested them in the Society as trustees, and the Society made an agreement with him to maintain a Hospital first of all for 50 and later for 100 boys. The property made over to the Society by a deed of 25 November 1708 included the mansion house in Bristol where the Hospital was located, the manor of Beere and the manor of Locking. The Attorney-General in 1842 maintained that the Society took these lands and rents on trust for the benefit of the Charity and committed itself to maintain 100 boys, even if the revenues of the Charity should be insufficient. The Society maintained that the lands were conveyed to it *absolutely* for their own use, subject only to their maintaining 100 boys. It was admitted by both sides that the Society must perform its trust, even if the income was insufficient. The Society argued from this that it was entitled to any profits if the income in fact exceeded what was required to maintain the boys.[55]

A further complication arose from the fact that the manor of Beere purchased by the Society on behalf of Edward Colston for the purpose of providing income for the Hospital was in the occupation of Colonel Bowyer at a yearly rent of £315. By an indenture of 26

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[54] The account which W. W. Ward gave to Latimer (*Merchant Venturers*, pp. 293–8) seems to me to contain a strong element of special pleading. I do not understand how W. W. Ward reached the conclusion that surplus rents from Stogursey had been used "in reduction of the advances made to the Charity". Ward said "this was practically admitted", but it was not admitted in the judgement of the Master of the Rolls in 1842. Ward also said (p. 296) "It seemed hard to admit that the Society would engage in 1708 to maintain the charity at a possible, if not certain loss, and without the possibility of reimbursement." It seems to have done precisely that, partly at least because neither Colston nor the Society thought there would be a loss. As was pointed out in the course of the trial, the Society obtained considerable benefits, including the right to nominate the schoolmaster and 50 of the boys, the patronage of the living at Locking, and a good deal of prestige. In practice (although this was not mentioned in the trial), for over 50 years it employed the headmaster as its Collector and Receiver of Rents in Clifton and Bristol. It was also pointed out that if the Society had wished to cover itself against possible loss, it could have done so in the original contract. There is no evidence that it made any attempt to do so.

[55] The decree of the Master of the Rolls in 1842 summed up neatly the Society's case: "Having to bear the risk of loss, it is argued they ought to have the benefit of the profit."

March 1709, Bowyer argeed to pay the Society £2,500 for a lease for lives for himself and his wife of the land he occupied at a yearly rent of £5. The balance of his rent (£310 a year) was to be paid to the Hospital by the Society during the lifetime of Bowyer and his wife. In fact, Bowyer paid the Society only £500 of the £2,500 he owed for his lease. Instead of the balance of £2,000, the Society accepted from Bowyer the assignment of a mortgage debt of £2,000 due from John Hobbs. The security for the mortgage was a lease of the manor of Monkton in Stogursey which Hobbs held from Eton College. When it became necessary for Hobbs to pay a renewal fine on his lease to Eton College in 1713, he was unable to do so and in fact died insolvent. The Society then paid the renewal fine and took the lease in trust to secure to themselves the sum of £2,610 due to it from Hobbs as a result of its original transaction with Bowyer. This was in 1713. Thenceforth, the Society regarded the manor of Monkton in Stogursey as its own and not as land held on behalf of the Charity. It did not account to the Hospital for the profits of Stogursey.

In fact, the income from the Colston estates was not sufficient to cover the cost of maintaining 100 boys, and for the greater part of the eighteenth century, the Hospital was in debt to the Society, at times for as much as £10,000. The fact that the Hospital was in debt to the Society was, of course, used by the Society in defence of its claim to the manor of Stogursey, although it was not strictly relevant to the question of who owned Stogursey or to the wider question of whether the Society held the whole of the charity lands absolutely or in trust for the Charity. If the Society had absolute ownership (subject always to its maintaining 100 boys in the Hospital), then it had no case to answer. If it held them only in trust, then it must account to the Hospital for all the profits of Stogursey from the time when it first made the arrangement about it with Colonel Bowyer. Even if Stogursey was found to belong to the Society, the Society would still have to account to the charity for £500 received from Bowyer and for £2,000 owing to the Charity from Bowyer and in lieu of which the Society had taken over the mortgage on Stogursey. The Attorney-General calculated that the Society's debt to the Charity would amount to about £17,000.

The case came before the Master of the Rolls, Lord Langdale, on 28 and 29 May 1842. He gave judgement on 1 August 1842. It was to the effect that the manor of Monkton had been obtained through a transaction with a Charity Property, and must also be deemed to be Charity Property. He did not accept the argument that since the Society had in the original agreement run a risk of loss if the income from the estates was insufficient, that it was therefore entitled to any profits. He pointed out that it had in fact got considerable benefits from the arrangement and that this might well have induced the

Society to undertake the trust without covering itself in any way against possible loss. He stated "I am of opinion that the Society was not entitled to deal in the way they did with the trust property for their own benefit and that they are charged with any profit which shall appear to have arisen from the transaction, and that in making the enquiry as to the profit which they made, they ought to be charged on account with the sum of £2,500 and to have credit for the rent of £310 which they paid or accounted for during the lives of Bowyer and his wife; and I think the Defendants should be charged with the amount of such profits as the Master shall find to have been made by the transaction together with the interest thereon."

There then followed a discussion between the Master of the Rolls and counsel on both sides about whether the whole of the profits on Stogursey from the very beginning should be taken into account. The Attorney-General did not press for this and was willing to agree that the profits should be accounted for only from the time the bill was filed in 1839. The Master of the Rolls accepted this and decreed that costs of both sides should be paid out of these profits. He also asked whether there ought to be a Scheme for the future administration of the Charity, but the Attorney-General did not ask for a Scheme and said "I believe it is very well managed."

Colston's Hospital had in the course of the eighteenth century run into considerable debt to the Society, although it had not been in debt at the time when the Society acquired Stogursey. The Society should legally have made sure that Stogursey, which it acquired through a transaction involving charity lands, was vested in the Charity and the profits from it should have been used to maintain the Hospital and reduce the debt. Although the Society had not aimed at making a profit for itself, it had acted illegally.

The decision of the Master of the Rolls concerning Stogursey in 1842 was extremely important and had wider implications. If the Society's view had been accepted, then it would in effect have acquired absolute ownership not only of Stogursey but of the other Colston lands, provided it continued to fulfil the obligation of maintaining 100 boys in Colston's Hospital, and it would have been free to use any surplus income from the charity lands for whatever purpose it chose.

The Society was extremely reluctant to accept that it could be in the wrong. Claxton wrote in February 1843, "against anything so monstrously unjust the Society have determined on an Appeal". He argued that the Hall had never wanted to increase its own funds by appropriating revenue originally settled on the Hospital, even though there was a balance of £2,800 owing to the Society. Stogursey, however, had always been regarded by the Society as its own absolute property and the Hall had engaged in public works and contracted debts in the belief that it was part of its General Funds. He argued that any diminution of the Society's revenue would to a very important extent prejudice the Public Interest of the City and Port, to the improvement of which they had dedicated their surplus revenues.

A number of arguments were prepared by the Hall in December 1842 and submitted by John Savage (the Master), William Claxton (the Treasurer), Jeremiah Osborne (the Clerk) and Richard Brickdale Ward (one of Osborne's partners) to Mr. Kindersley, Mr. Turner and Mr. John Osborne, the Society's counsel in the case. Learned counsel thought that although the case was by no means clear of doubt, yet there was very good reason for an appeal. The Master and Treasurer reported to the Hall and said they thought there was a reasonable chance of success, and the Hall decided to appeal.[56]

The appeal was a long-drawn-out affair. It was not until 7 December 1844 that the Hall finally decided to take it to the Lord Chancellor and not the House of Lords,[57] and it was not until 28 January 1848 that the Lord Chancellor gave judgement. After dealing with Colston's two gifts and his deed of settlement, he pointed out that the deed made provision for a reduction in the number of boys if at any time the income was insufficient to maintain one hundred. Colston's intention had been to devote all the properties to charitable purposes and not to bestow them on the Society on condition they carried out the objects of the charity. The judgement of 1842 was therefore correct. With regard to Stogursey, he thought the fact that the Society had been required to account for the money only from 1839 and not from the very beginning of the transaction was probably very much to the benefit of the Society. He was not prepared to charge the Charity with the cost of an appeal for which he thought there was no sufficient ground and he dismissed the appeal with costs.[58]

COLSTON'S HOSPITAL IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The transference to the Colston Charity of the disputed estates meant that a larger income was now available for the Hospital,[59] and the Society began to think in terms of reorganisation and expansion.[60] There was a great deal of discussion in the eighteen-fifties about what should be done.[61] What eventually emerged was a Scheme, which the Master of the Rolls approved on 3 August 1857, authorising the trustees to add new classrooms and dormitories and, if necessary, to borrow up to £4,000.[62]

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[56] *H.B.19*, p. 281, 28 Sept. 1842; p. 323, 4 Jan. 1843.

[57] *H.B.20*, p. 76, 7 Dec. 1844.

[58] For all this, see the Clerk's papers relating to the case (note 51).

[59] In 1856, there was estimated to be an excess of income over expenditure of £770 a year, and a prospective surplus of £1,095.

The Society now began to think about the desirability of removing the Hospital from its restricted quarters in the Great House on St. Augustine's Back to Stapleton, a few miles from Bristol, where a large estate formerly belonging to the bishop was on the market for £12,000. On 22 October 1858, the committee signed a contract to buy the house and estate for that sum, subject to approval by the Charity Commissioners.[63] The house and 9½ acres were bought on behalf of the Hospital for £6,000, and the Society put up another £6,000 to acquire the rest of the estate for itself.[64]

There was fierce opposition to the proposal to move the school from John Salmon and twelve other members of the Society, from some of the Colston Nominees, from the Reverend John Hensman and a number of the clergy, and from other Bristolians, but in the end the Master of the Rolls in open court decided to confirm the purchase.[65] The school was moved to Stapleton in October 1861.[66]

Further trouble was in store for the Society as a result of the Schools Inquiry Commission set up in 1864.[67] In his Report, published in 1868, one of the Assistant Commissioners, C. H. Stanton, praised the move to Stapleton and also stated that there appeared to be no political bias in the selection of boys, even though all the trustees were Conservatives. But he though the standard of education was not as high as in Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, Bristol, even though the boys stayed much longer. He suggested that the trustees were reluctant to introduce higher studies and feared to raise the education above that which they considered suitable for the class of boy they wanted to attend the school.[68] As Mr. Eames points out,

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[60] In February 1849, the Committee reported that the funds would allow for another 20 boys and for improvement in the accommodation and facilities of the Hospital (Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 298).

[61] In 1852, the Hall began a new series of Volumes – *Books of Charity Proceedings*, of which No. 1 (1852–67) has a great deal of information about reorganisation.

[62] *Book of Charity Proceedings 1, 1852–1867*, pp. 146 ff., 3 Aug. 1857.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 176, 22 Oct. 1858.

[64] *H.B.22*, pp. 319 ff., 3 March 1859; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 299.

[65] *Book of Charity Proceedings 1, 1852–1867*, pp. 106 ff.; *H.B.22*, pp. 319 ff., 3 March 1859; D. J. Eames, "The Contribution of the Society of Merchant Venturers to the Development of Education in Bristol", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis, 1966, pp. 98 ff.

[66] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[67] For full details, see D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, chapter 4, pp. 100 ff. ("The Endowed Schools Commission and the Colston Trust").

[68] See D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 101 ff.

Stanton's criticisms were in many ways unfair and a number of new subjects had in fact been introduced since 1830.[69]

In view of these criticisms, the Hospital Committee was asked to consider extending the educational system to include Natural Sciences. After taking expert advice, particularly from Henry Moseley,[70] canon of Bristol Cathedral, it reported in favour of introducing scientific subjects into the curriculum. There was to be an entrance examination and the boys were to leave at 14, except those who were taking science. Half-yearly examinations in practical science were to be conducted by independent examiners.[71]

In spite of opposition from some of the Nominees, the Society pressed on with the scheme. The question arose as to whether the headmaster was a suitable person to run a school in which science was to play a major part. The Committee had consulted Mr. Coomber, headmaster of the Bristol Trade and Mining School, who had recommended that there should be an Upper Division in Colston's Hospital in which should be taught mathematics, mechanical physics, experimental physics, chemistry, machine drawing, building construction, magnetics, electricity and heat and light. Mr. Coomber thought that the headmaster should be a scientist and that if the Hospital wanted to attract grants for these subjects, he would have to be a science graduate or at least have passed the government's Science Examination. The committee suggested that the Headmaster should take the examination.[72] Rowlatt was clearly upset by the proposal to alter the nature of the school, and although he professed his ability to teach science, he was not prepared to take the examination.[73] The Society decided that he must resign and so "obviate the necessity for any formal exercise by the Society of the powers it possesses". He had no option but to do so, and his resignation was accepted on 4 March 1870.[74]

Meanwhile, more trouble had arisen. The Endowed Schools Commissioners set up under the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 had sent to Bristol an Assistant Commissioner, I. G. Fitch. As a result of his enquiries in 1869 and 1870, he proposed sweeping changes. He seems to have been obsessed by his discovery that the three Hospital

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[69] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 107, 108. History and Geography in 1830, Music in 1842, Mathematics and Navigation in 1844, Physical Education in 1847. A library had been built up since 1838.

[70] He had been Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy and Astronomy at King's College, London, from 1831 to 1844.

[71] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 120 ff.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 212; *H.B.24*, p. 401, 11 Feb. 1870.

[74] For some of the correspondence, see *H.B.24*, pp. 404 ff., 25 Feb. 1870. There had earlier been some differences of opinion with Rowlatt (*Book of Charity Proceedings 2*, p. 45, 6 Jan. 1869).

Schools in Bristol (Colston's, Queen Elizabeth's and Red Maids) had between them an income of £14,000 a year but were educating only 436 children.[75] He thought these endowments should not be used to provide free education for the poorer classes who could get primary education for two pence or three pence a week in existing schools. Instead, the endowments should be used to establish a day school for 300 boys, a day school for 200 girls, both of which were to be fee-paying, and a Trade School.[76]

Fitch's proposals would have altered radically the nature of Colston's Hospital. The Society felt bound to defend the trust and made counter-proposals.[77] Meanwhile, at the suggestion of the Endowed Schools Commission, Mr. Rowlatt was asked to stay on for a time at the Hospital. He agreed to do so, but the committee was not satisfied with his behaviour, and at the end of 1870 he was given six months' salary in lieu of notice.[78] There were 250 applications for his post, and John Hancock was appointed at the beginning of 1871.[79]

It is not necessary here to follow in detail the very lengthy negotiations and discussions which ensued.[80] The Hall put forward an Alternative Scheme, and was prepared to endow the Hospital with £10,000 if it was accepted.[81] This generous offer no doubt helped the Society to get something more to its liking than Fitch's proposals. The Endowed Schools Commissioners drew up an Amended Scheme which was received by the Hall in July 1873.[82] This proposed a new body of Trustees including the Bishop of Bristol, three representatives of the Bristol School Board, three Justices of the Peace and three coopted members as well as 13 representatives of the Society out of a total membership of 23. Colston's Hospital was to remain a boarding school with 100 exhibitioners who were to receive board, lodging and, if necessary, clothes, but they were to be chosen on merit and not nominated by the Society or Colston's Nominees. 80 of them were to come from Bristol elementary schools and 20 from Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Somerset. In addition, the Governors could admit fee-paying pupils. Education was to be in accordance with the principles of the Church of England, but the Commissioners inserted a conscience clause giving parents the right to withdraw their children from religious instruction on conscientious grounds.[83]

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[75] For Fitch's letter of 1 April 1870, see D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 122 ff.

[76] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 117 ff. For these and other proposals, see Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 300–1.

[77] *Book of Charity Proceedings 2*, pp. 134 ff.

[78] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 128. He was voted a pension of 100 guineas a year.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[80] *Ibid.*, pp. 131 ff. Many of the arguments and documents are to be found in *Book of Charity Proceedings 2*.

[81] *H.B.25*, p. 133, 24 Feb. 1872. It proposed to cancel £5,000 debt which the Hospital owed to the Society and give £5,000 as a donation.

[82] Printed as an appendix in D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*

The Amended Scheme also required the Colston Trustees to take over and develop the Bristol Trade and Mining School.[84] Further, they were to establish a third-grade day school for 200 girls with 13 governors, 8 of them drawn from the governors of Colston's Boys School, and 5 of them ladies chosen by the governors of the girls' school.

The new Scheme after some modification was accepted in its final form by the Society in April 1874 and came into operation in March 1875.[85]

The long battle between the Society and the Endowed Schools Commission had resulted in the preservation of at least some of the essential characteristics of the Hospital entrusted to the Society by Edward Colston in the early eighteenth century and had ensured that the money which he had left for the education of poor children was not diverted to subsidising only the education of fee-paying pupils. The Society had managed to salvage a great deal because it had fought hard and because it had contributed £5,000 as well as releasing the Hospital from its debt of £5,000.[86]

Strictly speaking, Latimer was correct when he said that in 1875 Colston's Hospital was disconnected from the Society and that its subsequent history was outside the scope of his work,[87] but nevertheless a very close relationship still remained. The Society continued to act as trustee and manager of the property and it nominated 13 out of the 23 governors. It thus had a majority on the new governing body, even though that body was not directly answerable to the Society. Some brief mention must, therefore, be made of later developments.[88]

Colston's School at Stapleton now admitted fee-paying pupils as well as non-fee payers from the elementary schools in Bristol and the surrounding counties who were chosen by competitive examinations.[89] The School aimed at providing "sound, practical and liberal education" for "the sons of farmers, tradesmen, clerks and others".[90] Under the 1873 Scheme no boy was allowed to stay on after reaching the age of 15, but from 1883 20 boys were allowed to continue until the end of the term in which they became 16, and 5 were allowed an additional year.[91] In 1900, the School was recognised by the Department of Education for grants on the results of examinations, and in 1903 it was recognised by the new Board of Education.[92]

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[83] See D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 140 ff. for comment on the fact that the Society did not object to this clause which was at variance with the terms of Edward Colston's bequest.

[84] See p. 376.

[85] *H.B.25*, p. 321, 11 April 1874.

[86] The Treasurer reported that the contribution had been made in June 1875. Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 303.

[87] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 302, 303.

[88] See D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, chapter 6, pp. 167 ff. "1869–1944. A Boys' School, a Girls' School and a Technical College". Mr. Eames shows that between 1869 and 1944 the Society's interest in education was at its height and that it devoted a great deal of time, effort and money to helping all three institutions.

[89] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 172, for the numbers of free scholars. The number of fee-payers varied between 30 and over 70 in the period 1877–93.

COLSTON'S GIRLS SCHOOL

As has already been seen, the Scheme of 1873 required the new Colston Trustees to be responsible for the Trade and Mining School and to establish a day school for girls. Owing to the agricultural depression beginning in the mid eighteen-seventies, the Colston Trustees' funds were insufficient, and the Society came to the rescue in 1885 by agreeing to take over itself the Trade and Mining School,[93] leaving the Colston Trustees free to use their resources for Colston's School and for the establishment of Colston's Girls School. Eventually, a site was obtained in Cheltenham Road, and a contract for a school for 300 girls was signed in March 1889. The school opened in January 1891 with a headmistress, a second mistress and 3 assistants. By April, the number of pupils was approaching 300, and it was decided to appoint 3 more assistant mistresses. There were originally 10 free places for girls from elementary schools and the rest paid £5 a year. The school was recognised by the Board of Education in 1902.[94]

THE MERCHANT VENTURERS' TECHNICAL COLLEGE

In 1885, the Society took over from the Colston Trustees the management and finance of the Bristol Trade and Mining School. The Trade and Mining School had been established in 1856 in premises in Nelson Street which had been used for a Diocesan School from 1812 to 1852. The growth of parish schools had made the Diocesan School superfluous, and Canon Moseley,[95] encouraged by the interest in technical education associated with the Great Exhibition of 1851, had recommended to the trustees that they should establish a School of Applied Science. There was considerable enthusiasm, and in 1856 there came into existence the Bristol Diocesan Trade and Mining School which had a primary department; a secondary department teaching commercial subjects, mathematics and applied science; day classes for adults in chemistry, mining and engineering; and a range of evening classes in languages, mathematics, drawing, commercial subjects and Latin.[96] The Trade and Mining School enjoyed considerable success, and, as has been seen, the Society in 1863 made an arrangement with it by which the Society's Navigation School was transferred to this institution.[97]

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[90] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

[91] *Ibid.*, pp. 176 ff. The Charity Commissioners refused to allow this to apply to boys with free places.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[93] See p. 377.

[94] For further details, see D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 200 ff.

[95] See p. 372 and note 70.

In 1872, when there were lengthy negotiations between the Society and the Endowed Schools Commissioners, the Society suggested at one time that the Trade and Mining School should be amalgamated with Colston's Hospital or, alternatively, that the Society should take it over and develop it.[98] This proposal did not come to anything, and instead in 1875 a newly appointed body of Colston's Trustees, on which the Society had a majority, took over not only Colston's Hospital but also the Trade and Mining School as well as the obligation to establish a Colston's Girls School.[99]

The fact that in 1875 it had lost direct control of Colston's Hospital may have predisposed the Society to seek a new outlet for its interest in education. The opportunity arose because the Colston Trustees ran into financial difficulties which prevented them developing the Trade and Mining School. In 1877 the headmaster pointed out that the premises in Nelson Street were quite inadequate. The Governors seriously considered purchasing either the premises in Unity Street vacated by Bristol Grammar School or some other plot of land which could be used both for the Trade School and the proposed Girls School, but in 1879 they decided to postpone any further action because of the agricultural depression and the decrease in income for the Somerest lands.[100]

At this time, the Society or some of its members began to show an interest which was not fully recorded in the Hall records.[101] On 30 April 1880, George William Edward informed the Standing Committee that his offer of £5,500 for the site of Bristol Grammar School's empty premises in Unity Street had been accepted.[102] He did not say why he had made the purchase or what was to be done with it, but obviously there must have been informal consultation and he must have had the support of the Standing Committee and the Society in general before he took such action. A few days later, a General Hall at which 19 members were present approved the purchase and the erection of a Merchant Venturers' Trade School.[103] In July 1880, Mr. Proctor Baker informed the Colston Trustees of the Society's intentions and probability that the building would be offered to them at a nominal rent.[104]

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[96] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 304 ff., D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, chapter 6, pp. 242 ff. In 1856, the Society gave £25 to help with the debt of £500 (*H.B.22*, p. 48, 11 April 1856).

[97] See p. 359.

[98] *H.B.25*, p. 136, 22 March 1872; p. 145, 30 April 1872; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 300–1.

[99] See p. 374.

[100] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 307.

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 308. Latimer thought that Alderman Proctor Baker, Chairman of the Colston Trustees and the oldest member of the Society, probably suggested the policy which bore fruit in the following years.

[102] *H.B.26*, pp. 301 ff., 4 May 1880; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 308.

It is possible that at this stage the Society was thinking only in terms of erecting a building and leasing it to the Colston Trustees for use by the Trade and Mining School, but in the following years it developed more ambitious plans.

First of all, it set about erecting the building, about which it took considerable trouble, at a cost of £29,698, and it also acquired additional property for use by the school.[105] When the building was nearly complete early in 1885, the Hall adopted a resolution stating that as the governors of the Colston Trust to whom it had intended to offer the use of the building had suffered loss of income and were unlikely to have sufficient money to carry on, still less develop, the Trade and Mining School, it was desirable to relieve them of their burden, so that they would be in a position to establish a Girls' School as proposed in 1875. The Society therefore offered to undertake the entire control, management and finance of the Trade and Mining School and would continue to develop it "for the promotion of scientific and technological teaching."[106]

It was necessary to satisfy the Charity Commissioners that the proposal was in order. The Society rejected a suggestion that it should manage the school under the direction of the Commissioners, but its reputation and its willingness to put the property under a trust deed made it possible for the difficulties to be overcome, and the Trade and Mining School was moved from its old premises in Nelson Street into the new building in Unity Street in September 1885. It was now known as the Merchant Venturers' School.[107] The Merchant Venturers were thus not the founders of technical education in Bristol, and the school which they took over had been flourishing for nearly thirty years, but they came to its assistance at a time when it was in financial difficulties and in the years ahead made a tremendous and enthusiastic contribution to its development.

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[103] *H.B.26*, pp. 301 ff., 4 May 1880.

[104] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 308. The Governors expressed their gratitude and their willingness to accept the building if it were offered to them.

[105] It held a public competition but rejected all the plans and asked Mr. Robson to prepare new ones. He was unable to do so, as he had been one of the assessors for the competition. In 1881, it appointed as architect Mr. E. C. Robins. *H.B.26*, p. 341, 3 Feb. 1881; p. 349, 18 Feb. 1881; p. 351, 18 March 1881; p. 353, 8 April 1881; *H.B.27*, p. 45, 29 Feb. 1884; p. 59, 30 May 1884; p. 112, 1 May 1885; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 308–9.

[106] *H.B.27*, p. 102, 7 March 1885; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 309, 310.

[107] See *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 27 July 1885, for an account of the opening of "this noble building erected by the princely generosity of the Merchant Venturers" at a cost of £40–£50,000. The *Bristol Mercury* called it a handsome educational gift which would be supplemented by what practically amounted to £1,000 a year.

The Merchant Venturers' School was managed by a Committee of the Master, Wardens and 8 members elected on Charter Day. The minutes of this Management Committee from July 1885 to 1948 are found in five books of proceedings preserved in the Merchants' Hall.[108] The mass of detail recorded shows how seriously the Committee took its work and how effectively it set about reorganising the courses, raising the standards for admission and introducing new subjects into the curriculum.[109] Between 1884 and 1890, the number of day and evening students rose from 521 to 1,384.[110]

A good deal of credit for the early expansion must go to the headmaster, Thomas Coomber who had been headmaster of the old Trade and Mining School since it began in 1856 with only 5 pupils.[111] It is necessary to stress Coomber's contribution, partly because his work was to be overshadowed by that of his dynamic and publicity-conscious successor and partly because Coomber left the school under a cloud. In 1889 he was rebuked for not knowing why certain evening classes had fallen off and for not attending in the evenings, although he had undertaken to do so. An even more serious offence was that he had allowed his son to attend the school for several terms without notifying the committee. After lengthy correspondence, the Management Committee decided that he had forfeited their confidence and gave him the opportunity to avoid dismissal by resigning.[112] It is not possible to discover what really lay behind this dismissal which, on the face of it, seems rather harsh treatment of a man who had served the cause of education so well both before and after the Society took over the school. It may be that the Committee wanted someone with higher qualifications and was not sorry to let Coomber go. It softened the blow by giving him a pension of £300 a year on condition that he ceased from all educational work within fifty miles of Bristol, except his lectures at the Bristol Medical School.[113]

The new headmaster was Julius Wertheimer, B.A., B.Sc., F.I.C., F.C.S., who was appointed on 1 June 1890 with a guaranteed minimum salary of £500 a year but no provision for a retirement pension. It was thought that with various fees he should get in all about £530 a year.[114] In the manner of new brooms, Wertheimer reported critically on the state of the school at the time when he took over. He found the school arrangements in a somewhat chaotic condition "as each master appeared to be allowed to act independently of other masters and of the Head Master". There was an absence of any records by which the present position and past history of the pupils could be ascertained. Moreover, the school timetable did not agree with the courses prescribed in the syllabus. Masters in the primary division were only moderately well suited for their work, and one of them was inefficient. He was dismissed. Wertheimer went on to make a number of other adverse comments and to put forward numerous proposals for reorganisation and for the introduction of new subjects.[115]

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[108] Vol. 1, 1885–91; Vol. 2, 1891–97; Vol. 3, 1897–1903; Vol. 4, 1903–21; Vol. 5, 1922–48.

[109] See *M.V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 1, passim.*

[110] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 320, gives the figures in 1890 as 1,430, but Julius Wertheimer's Report (*M.V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 2 1891–1897*, p. 194) gives the number as 1,384, of whom 368 were in the Boys' School, 48 in Senior Day Classes, and 968 in evening classes.

[111] *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 28 Dec. 1889 and its obituary notice, 23 May 1901.

[112] *M.V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 1*, pp. 110, 137–47, 24 Oct. 1889.

[113] *M.V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 1*, p. 153, 29 May 1890; p. 162, 4 July 1890.

The new regime was probably unpopular with some of the staff. At the end of the year, an assistant master who disobeyed the order that masters should see that pupils left the school in an orderly manner was reported to the Management Committee. He maintained that he had no responsibility beyond teaching in the form room, and as he refused to give way, he was dismissed.[116]

From the detailed annual reports prepared by Wertheimer and preserved in the Minutes, it is clear that year by year in the eighteen-nineties the Merchant Venturers' School increased its numbers and expanded the range of its activities. In June 1896, it had 2,065 students on its books as compared with 1,384 in July 1890.[117] By 1903, the total enrolment was 2,512.[118]

The growing importance of the Merchant Venturers' School and the desire of those responsible for it to emphasise its special contribution to technical education was symbolised in 1894 by the adoption of the title Technical College, "the word College (already employed by similar institutions in London and elsewhere) conveying to the public mind the idea of a larger and more important place of education than does the word 'School', and 'Technical' indicating precisely the kind of education which the College supplies".[119]

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[114] *Ibid.*, p. 149, 21 Feb. 1890; p. 150, 4 March 1890; p. 151, 3 April 1890. There is room for a detailed examination of the career and achievements of Julius Wertheimer who was clearly a man of outstanding ability, although he cannot have been easy to get on with. For some account of his work, see *Bristol Evening News*, 6 March 1905. He was born in Birmingham in 1859 and went to University College, Liverpool, and Owen's College, Manchester, taking a B.A. in 1882 and a B.Sc. in 1885. He was head of Leeds' College of Science and Technology from 1887 to 1890. He took the first photograph by X-rays made in Bristol, and the first surgical operation in Bristol in which X-rays were used was performed on the faith of an X-ray photograph taken by him.

[115] *Ibid.*, pp. 165 ff. for his Report in 1890.

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 182, 12 Dec. 1890; p. 185, 5 Feb. 1891. He wrote expressing his regrets and asked that he might be deemed to have resigned. He had apologised to Wertheimer, who supported his application. The Committee agreed to his request.

[117] *M.V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 2*, pp. 194, 233.

[118] *M.V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 4 1903–1921*, pp. 21 ff. The breakdown was Preparatory and Boys' School, 418; Adult Day Classes, 287; Adult Evening Classes, 1,458; Branch classes, 134 (Bristol); 129 (Gloucestershire); Gloucestershire Teachers (Nature Study), 86.

Unfortunately, the rapid growth of the College led to serious problems. By 1893, the resources were strained to the uttermost, and efforts were made to acquire additional premises in Unity Street, Orchard Street and Denmark Street. For various reasons, these efforts were unsuccessful, and the College had to do the best it could with a house in Unity Street which already belonged to the Society.[120] Lack of space prevented the College from growing as much as it might have done.

There was also a somewhat complicated situation concerning finance. In January 1891, the City had set up a Technical Instruction Committee which had available a sum of about £5,700 a year.[121] There was much discussion in the Society about whether it should ask the City for some of this money to help in the maintenance and expansion of the School. At this stage, the Society did not realise how much technical education was going to cost, and it preferred to go it alone rather than to make a bid for a large grant which would, presumably, have meant some limitations on its right to run its own school without interference. Instead, it suggested to the Technical Instruction Committee the establishment of a number of scholarships, and the City decided to devote £1,350 to this purpose.

Some years later, when the Society was engaged in a demarcation conflict with University College, Bristol, it complained, a little bitterly, that the Technical Instruction Committee had voted a capital sum of £2,000 to University College as well as £500 a year for 10 free scholarships tenable only at University College, and that "their bounty (inadvertently no doubt) furnished means for more serious competition with the Society's College in Technical Subjects, especially Engineering, than was previously possible".[122] It would seem that the Society's determination to maintain complete independence deprived it in some degree of the opportunity of developing the Technical College on an even more impressive scale and indirectly encouraged the growth of University College and of other centres of technical education in Bristol.

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[119] *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1900*, pp. 36 ff., 13 Oct. 1899, Report of a sub-committee set up on 4 Nov. 1897 to consider whether it would be to the Society's advantage to receive direct aid from the Technical Instruction Committee of the Town Council (Note that this volume of *Reports and Memoranda* should not be confused with another volume of *Reports and Memoranda* bearing the dates *1891–1901*).

[120] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 318, 319.

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 317.

[122] *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1900*, pp. 36 ff.

Nevertheless, the Merchant Venturers' Technical College did in fact benefit very considerably from the increasing resources made available for technical education by the central government and the local authorities. In 1885, the Society had been prepared to spend up to £2,000 a year on the College, but in 1904 it noted that owing to the large grants received, it had not been called upon to do so. The printed accounts for 1902–3 show the Society's contribution for that year as £3,178 10s. 0d., but a typescript note in the *Book of Proceedings* points out that the actual contribution in cash was only £988 6s. 9d. The balance of the contribution consisted of rent debited to the College at the rate of 3 per cent on the capital outlay (£1,540 3s. 3d.) and a proportion of the salaries paid in the Treasurers' Office where much of the College business was transacted (£650 0s. 0d.). It was no doubt reasonable that these sums should be debited to the College to indicate the true cost to the Society, but the printed accounts were somewhat misleading and gave a wrong impression of what was actually being given in cash.[123]

By 1897 the Society was very much concerned with the question of whether it should apply for direct aid to the Technical Instruction Committee of the City and with the further problem of how best to make arrangements with the Bristol School Board to prevent overlapping of classes, and on 4 November it set up a sub-committee to consider both questions.[124]

The sub-committee set up in 1897 engaged in lengthy negotiations to try to prevent overlapping between the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and other institutions. It was concerned with the activities of the Bristol School Board which was applying to the Department of Science and Art for recognition of Merrywood School as a School of Science and which was proposing to open other Schools of Science which the sub-committee thought would be "in undue and unnecessary competition with efficient schools already in existence". The Society also negotiated with the Bristol School of Art. As a result, satisfactory arrangements were made with the School Board and with the School of Art in March 1899.[125]

The problem of the proper relationship between the Merchant

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[123] *M V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 4, 1903–1921*, pp. 21 ff. and typescript note, dated 30 April 1904, added to the printed accounts. This meant that the Society had not in fact made a free gift of the buildings as was popularly believed.

[124] *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1900*, p. 36, for a Report of this sub-committee, dated 13 Oct. 1899, signed G. H. Pope, W. W. Ward, W. Proctor Baker and Julius Wertheimer.

[125] *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1900*, pp. 19 ff. and the Report of 13 Oct. 1899 referred to in previous note.

Venturers' Technical College and University College, Bristol, was much more difficult. University College had been established in 1876,[126] and the Society had contributed £1,000 to its Appeal Fund of £25,000.[127] By 1896, the Society was less sympathetic and when an appeal for funds was received from the College, the Hall resolved that the application should be declined.[128] As the Merchant Venturers' Technical College developed its advanced studies, it was thought by University College to be duplicating courses held in that institution, and there was a request for discussions with a view to preventing overlapping. The most prominent representatives of the Society in the negotiations were G. H. Pope, W. W. Ward and Julius Wertheimer.[129] A good deal of heat was produced in the attempt to solve the problem. The Society's representatives argued that the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, far from being an interloper poaching in somebody else's field, was in fact a continuation of the Trade and Mining School which went back to 1856, twenty years before University College came into existence. When University College was established in 1876, the Trade and Mining School was already teaching the sciences relating to engineering, mining, metallurgy, manufacturers and commerce, and when University College established the rudiments of an Engineering Department it did so *in rivalry with the Trade School.* If there was duplication, it was entirely the fault of University College. The Society's representatives also made much of the argument that courses at the Technical College were within the means of the poorer students who could not possibly afford the high fees demanded by University College.

The long drawn out discussion between 1897 and 1900 cannot be followed in detail here. There were numerous proposals and counter-proposals in the course of which the representatives of the Merchant Venturers put forward the idea that eventually the two colleges should form a West of England University and Technical College. University College, which was much more concerned with overlapping courses than with federation, argued that by the proposed division of functions, it was being asked to give up a great deal, and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College little or nothing. It acidly remarked "Overlap is to be prevented by assigning to one Institution practically the whole of the territory in dispute."[130] University College then made counter-proposals, and the Society's representatives put forward major amendments.[131] After lengthy discussions, University College commented on 18 July 1900 that the Society's scheme would require it to give up degree work in Engineering and Applied Science, and this it was not prepared to accept.[132] Since the Merchant Venturers' Technical College also attached great importance to its work in engineering, this meant an end to the negotiations, and G. H. Pope wrote to that effect to the committee of University College on 10 August 1900.[133]

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[126] For University College, see J. W. Sherborne and B. Cottle, *The Life of a University*, 2nd edition, 1959.

[127] *H.B.25*, p. 333, 26 June 1874; p. 340, 24 July 1874; *H.B.26*, p. 251, 23 May 1879.

[128] *H.B.28*, p. 152, 28 Feb. 1896.

[129] In the Society's archives, there is a considerable amount of material relating to the negotiations from February 1897 to August 1900. The main evidence is in *M.V.T.C. Books of Proceedings 2* and *3*. Many of the documents were copied into *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1901* which has George H. Pope's signature in the front and a summary at the end which he presumably made for his own use.

An attempt to prevent a complete breakdown of negotiations was then made by a senior member of the Society, W. W. Jose, who wrote to W. W. Ward and to the Treasurer pointing out that the proposals of University College, Bristol, were not unreasonable and saying "Do let me beg you and your colleagues to reconsider . . . and to be willing to recommend a small sacrifice for the sake of a greater gain." Jose also urged that there should be a personal conference with Albert Fry and his two colleagues and offered to act as an intermediary. As a result of this G. H. Pope wrote to Fry suggesting a conference and the Society prepared a modified statement of its position on lines which Jose thought would be acceptable to University College. There was further correspondence and a meeting took place at the Council House in June 1901 but it ended in deadlock on the main issue, although there was some agreement about minor points.[134] The conflict of interests which had emerged in the course of these negotiations was to be a major problem when it was proposed to establish a University of Bristol in the early twentieth century.

Conflict had arisen partly because the two institutions had developed without much relationship to each other and partly because the Trade and Mining School which the Society took over in 1885 had grown so remarkably in the eighteen-nineties that it became involved in higher education and was a serious challenge to the struggling University College. It is unlikely that the Society had this in mind when it first assumed responsibility for the School, but in the eighteen-nineties it became immensely proud of what had been achieved and it was determined to give full support to its representatives who in the course of the negotiations made a bid to make the Technical College part of a federated West Country University. George Henry Pope, who was Treasurer from 1876 to 1901 and who then became Secretary of the Technical College,[135] W. W. Ward who was Master when the negotiations first began in 1897, and Julius Wertheimer, the Principal of the College, were determined negotiators anxious to increase the prestige and importance of their institution.

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[130] *M.V.T.C. Book of Proceedings 3*. Printed proposal of 14 Dec. 1898 signed by G. H. Pope, W. W. Ward and J. Wertheimer, and reply by University College, 20 Feb. 1899.

[131] *Ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1899, and Memorandum replying to this signed by Pope, Ward and Wertheimer, 12 April 1899.

[132] *Ibid.*, 13 July 1899, signed by Albert Fry, J. W. Arrowsmith, C. Lloyd Morgan. See also the Society's comment of 19 Sept., 1899, 6 Dec. 1899 and 21 Dec. 1899. For a time, there seemed to be hope of a solution.

[133] *Ibid.*, 18 July 1900; 10 Aug. 1900.

[134] *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1901*, pp. 201–15. At the meeting in June 1901, the Society was represented by Pope, Ward and Wertheimer (p. 215).

The conflict of interests was probably exacerbated by political differences. The supporters of University College had tended on the whole to be Liberals in politics, while the Merchant Venturers was basically Conservative. The Wills and the Frys who had done so much for University College were not members of the Society. In addition, there may well have been temperamental differences between the leading men on both sides and somewhat different ideas about what a university should be. The outlook, for instance, of the Principal of University College seems to have been very different from the more authoritarian approach of Julius Wertheimer and the Society which backed him. The conflicts were to continue into the twentieth century.

One other comment needs to be made on the developments of the eighteen-nineties. The Society of Merchant Venturers was instinctively against interference and control by other bodies. Its preference for going it alone whenever possible had put it in a somewhat isolated position. It had not asked for a grant from the Technical Instruction Committee of the City when it was set up in 1891, and by the later nineties, when it began to be aware of the large sums required for further development, it was in a difficult position as far as public bodies and public opinion were concerned. It had appeared in the role of the wealthy benefactor who had endowed the Technical College on a lavish scale, and it was generally believed to have large funds available. The sub-committee's Report in 1899 quoted, with distaste, a comment which had appeared in print stating that "The Guild of Merchant Venturers is enormously rich – the beautiful Clifton and Durdham Downs belongs to them, and since delightful buildings have been erected on parts of these, their wealth grows yearly." The Report went on to say "It can easily be understood how damaging to the Society, when it asks for help, is the possession of untold, but mythical, riches and how natural it is for the dispensers of public money to feel, even if they do not always say so in words, that, however beneficent the Society may be, and however admirable and worthy of support its College may be, money would be wasted if voted to so wealthy a Guild." It added that "so far from the Society's being the wealthy Corporation of the public (imagination) . . . it is really poor, and management of its finances involves care, if not anxiety".

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[135] See pp. 265–6.

Rather too late in the day, the Report put its finger on another way in which the Society had been the victim of its own policy of independence. It pointed out that the Merchant Venturers' Technical College was in some degree isolated: "As the Society had not at first felt the need for external assistance, it had till recently no occasion to interest other bodies or to get their cooperation, particularly the Technical Instruction Committee, whereas certain other institutions had added members of this Committee to their governing bodies and got very substantial aid" and also had "the advantage of having well-informed friends upon that Committee, without losing any control of their own domestic affairs". The Report of 1899 indicated that the time had come to abandon Splendid Isolation and to apply for help to the Technical Committee, even though that Committee would, under the Act of 1890, have to be represented on the Governing Body in proportion to the aid it gave.[136] In due course, the Society applied for help with a view to extending the buildings to College Green.

MISCELLANEOUS EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

In addition to these major activities, the Society assisted education in Bristol by a number of small grants and subscriptions throughout the century. Thus, in 1811 it voted £30 and an annual subscription of £5 for a school at Pill to instruct poor children in reading and writing.[137] In 1830, when Clifton Infants School was in financial difficulty, it agreed to forego the ground rent of £13 payable to the Society.[138] In 1833, it turned down a request by Mr. Hensman and others for a lease of ground on which to erect a National School in Clifton because the other lessees objected, but it made a grant of £25 towards the cost of building the school in the next year.[139] When the school founded by Edward Colston for teaching and clothing 40 poor boys in Temple parish was in difficulties in 1836, the Society assisted it with a grant of £15.[140] £25 was given in 1855 for the building of a parochial school for St. Nicholas and St. Leonard's parish and the same amount for the schools of St. Mary Redcliffe parish.[141] At the end of 1870 £100 was given for a school in St. Gabriel's parish, £200 for St. Silas, £100 for St. Simon and £25 for Bishopston.[142] Next year, St. Paul's school, Bedminster, received £25.[143]

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[136] *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1900*, No. 36, 13 Oct. 1899.

[137] *H.B.14*, p. 158, 19 June 1811.

[138] *H.B.16*, p. 390, 16 April 1830.

[139] *H.B.17*, p. 165, 2 July 1833; p. 271, 8 Nov. 1834. See also *H.B.17*, p. 144, 6 Feb. 1833; p. 147, 20 Feb. 1833.

[140] *H.B.17*, p. 432, 5 Oct. 1836.

Other grants to assist elementary education included £50 for a new schoolroom at St. Paul's, Bedminster, and £100 to Clifton parish school in 1877;[144] £20 to enlarge Horfield School in 1878;[145] £20 to Stapleton National School; £50 to Dowry School and £25 to enlarge the school at Rudgeway, Fishponds; £25 to enlarge Bishopston's Infants School in 1883;[146] 5 guineas for Bristol Ragged Schools and £25 for the increase of the accommodation in St. Mark's School, Easton, in 1884;[147] and £50 for Bristol Church Day Schools in 1892.[148]

The majority of the grants were for Church of England elementary schools, but a number of donations were made for other kinds of institutions. Thus, in 1875 £25 was given to the Certified Industrial School and £100 for additional buildings for the School of Art, provided it succeeded in raising the whole sum asked for in its Appeal.[149] Next year £100 and a subscription of £10 10s. a year was voted for the Training College for teachers at Fishponds.[150] £250 payable in five instalments was voted by the Standing Committee in 1878 for the Completion Fund of Clifton College, but this was not confirmed at meeting of the Hall.[151] However, when Clifton College asked the Society in 1882 to give an annual prize of £5 5s. for Natural Science, it agreed to do so, and made a similar donation to Bristol Grammar School.[152] £25 was voted for Kingswood Reformatory in 1883,[153] and £50 for the building of a new Industrial Home for girls at Upper Knowle in 1891.[154]

The Society had from a very early date some interest in education. That interest had been greatly strengthened in the early eighteenth century when Edward Colston's bequest made it responsible for the running of a Hospital for 100 boys, but it became, in the course of the nineteenth century, a major activity, partly because the Society gradually relinquished its concern for its earlier functions, partly because it was subjected to outside pressures from the Charity Commissioners and the Endowed Schools Commission, and partly because it began to see education as one of its main concerns. In 1875, it ceased to have direct control over Colston's Hospital, but in 1885 it took over the Bristol Trade and Mining School which grew under its management into a remarkable institution embracing a great range of educational work from primary to university level.

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[141] *H.B.21*, p. 467, 30 March 1855; p. 489, 8 June 1855.
[142] *H.B.25*, p. 23, 7 Dec. 1870.
[143] *H.B.25*, p. 48, 14 April 1871.
[144] *H.B.26*, p. 142, 28 Sept. 1877; p. 146, 26 Oct. 1877.
[145] *H.B.26*, p. 204, 27 Sept. 1878.
[146] *H.B.27*, p. 2, 23 Feb. 1883; p. 5, 22 March 1883; p. 14, 27 July 1883.
[147] *H.B.27*, p. 72, 24 Oct. 1884.
[148] *H.B.27*, p. 440, 29 July 1892.
[149] *H.B.26*, p. 2, 27 Oct. 1875; p. 23, 31 Dec. 1875.
[150] *H.B.26*, p. 48, 31 March 1876.
[151] *H.B.26*, p. 163, 25 Jan. 1878.
[152] *H.B.26*, p. 424, 22 June 1882.
[153] *H.B.27*, p. 14, 27 July 1883.
[154] *H.B.27*, p. 390, 26 June 1891.

CHAPTER 21

The Charitable Work of the Society in the Nineteenth Century

GENERAL CHARITABLE ACTIVITY

ANY satisfactory assessment of the contribution of the Society to charitable activity in the nineteenth century would have to take into account something which cannot be measured in terms of money – the voluntary work undertaken by a considerable number of its members in the administration of the various charities with which it was concerned. There is also the question of motives. Philanthropy may arise from a sincere love of God and a genuine concern for the less fortunate, but it could also be the result of a desire on the part of the rich to placate their consciences, to increase their feeling of self-importance or to be in the happy position of dispensing favours. No doubt motives were often mixed, and varied greatly from one individual to another. Whatever the reasons, a number of members of the Society gave generously of their time and energy.

The amount of money which the Society gave from its own funds to philanthropic, educational and religious purposes was modest compared with that given by some of the great London Livery Companies, largely because its own income was relatively small. Moreover, there were considerable fluctuations in the amounts given during these hundred years. In the earlier part of the century, the Society was struggling with its own financial difficulties and the shortage of liquid assets, and it still had many commitments relating to the economic life of the city. When it had got rid of these commitments and, in addition, began to reap a considerable harvest as a property-developer, it increasingly turned its attention to educational and charitable activities, which became the main justification for its existence.

It would be a laborious task to show what the Society gave, year by year, to the miscellaneous charities with which it was concerned. Among the Clerk's papers is a statement of Gifts for the 7 year period 29 September 1815–29 September 1822. This shows that it was making gifts at the rate of approximately £350 a year, but the figures include some substantial presents to the M.P.s and others which can hardly be considered as charitable, and the amount given for genuinely charitable purposes was probably between £200 and

£250 a year.[1] In Claxton's analysis of income and expenditure for the 5 years 1845–50, the total amount of ordinary and extraordinary gifts for the whole period was just over £1,000.[2] Thus, in the middle of the century, donations were still only about £200 a year, but in the second half of the century, they increased considerably. In 1863 for example, it was noted that the Society had given in charity £650,[3] and next year the amount was £1,130, including £600 voted for the Cotton Fund, which was intended to help meet distress among cotton workers resulting from the American Civil War.[4] At the end of 1871, Claxton noted with irritation that the first Standing Committee of the year had voted away nearly £1,400 in gifts, although the Treasurer in his financial statement had allowed for only £1,000.[5] The number of good causes to which the Society made annual subscriptions gradually increased. In 1890–1 subscriptions amounted to approximately £450 a year and donations came to approximately £850.[6] The amount given away was not vast, but the help was not negligible in nineteenth-century Bristol, and it did not include contributions made to educational work.

The range of charitable donations was considerable. A Society known to be interested in philanthropic work inevitably attracted the attention of institutions and individuals needing help, and the Society felt an obligation to do something, however limited, to assist in dealing with distress both at home and abroad.

One group of donations was concerned with helping the victims of various disasters, some natural, some man-made. In 1847, for example, £200 were given for the relief of the poor in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland who were suffering from famine as a result of the potato blight,[7] and 5 guineas were given to the poor of Spaxton and Worle, where the Society had land, to help those who were suffering from the same disaster.[8] In 1854, and again in 1855, £100 was given to the Patriotic Fund for Soldiers and Sailors in the Russian War,[9] and in 1857 £100 was donated to a relief fund for sufferers from the Indian Mutiny.[10] Two years later, £100 was provided for the relief of distressed pilots who had suffered in the great gale of October 1859,[11] and in 1866 the Shipwrecked Mariners Benevolent Society received an additional donation of £25 as a result of "the late unprecedented number of wrecks".[12] There was a donation of £50 for famine relief in India in 1861,[13] and in 1864 £300 was given to relieve distress in the Bristol cotton industry resulting from the American Civil War. Half of this went to the Lancashire Fund and half to the Bristol operatives.[14] In 1864, £50 was subscribed to help sufferers from a calamity caused by the bursting of the reservoir of the Sheffield Waterworks Company,[15] and in 1871 £100 went to the Mayor's Fund for the relief of sufferers from the calamitous fire in Chicago.[16] £250 was given to Indian Famine Relief in 1877;[17] £50 to the victims of a colliery explosion at Abercarne,[18] and £100 to help distressed colliers in Wales and the Forest of Dean in 1878;[19] and 2 guineas to flood relief in Hungary in 1879.[20] In 1882, £50 was donated "for the relief of distressed ladies in Ireland";[21] 20 guineas to help persecuted Jews in Russia;[22] and £100 to help the victims of floods.[23] There were more floods in 1889 when £5 was given to each of the 12 Bristol parishes affected, and £100 to the General Relief Fund.[24] The victims of the Great Fire at St. John's, Newfoundland, received £25 in 1892,[25] and there were donations of 100 guineas and 50 guineas to Indian Famine Relief in 1897 and 1900.[26] The Bristol Flood Relief Fund received £10 in 1899.[27]

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[1] Merchants' Hall Records: The Clerk's Papers (envelope containing miscellaneous papers). The return was probably one prepared for the Charity Commissioners. Presents to the M.P.s and to the Treasurer in 1815–16 amounted to £270 5s. 0d.; to £161 18s. 0d. in 1816–17; and to £133 in 1821–2.

[2] The large volume prepared by Claxton, see pp. 278–9 *supra*. The analysis of gifts is on p. 31 of his book.

[3] *H.B.23*, p. 273, 20 March 1863.

[4] *H.B.23*, pp. 344 ff., 23 Feb. 1864.

[5] *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 119, 29 Dec. 1871.

[6] *H.B.27*, p. 323, 31 Jan. 1890, for a list of 52 annual subscriptions, including £25 to the *Formidable* training ship; 25 guineas to the Bristol Benevolent Institute; £21 to the Bristol Infirmary; £20 to the Infirmary Chaplaincy; £21 to the Bristol General Hospital, and £10 to its chaplaincy. Non-recurrent grants in 1890–91 included 5 guineas to the Bristol Ladies' Home; £250 to help rebuild Kingswood Reformatory; £100 to enlarge St. Paul's, Bedminster; 10 guineas to the Children's Help Society; 5 guineas to the Prize Fund of the Bristol Volunteer Rifle Corps; £100 to the Bristol Medical School; £100 for coal for the poor in the severe weather.

[7] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 121, 15 Jan. 1847.

Subscriptions and donations were given to a great variety of organisations and institutions, and only some of these can be noted here. They include a gift of 5 guineas and an annual subscription of 2 guineas to the Bristol Humane Society in 1808 "for the Recovery of persons apparently dead by drowning or any other species of suffocation";[28] 10 guineas to the Deaf and Dumb Institute in 1857;[29]

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 121, 12 Feb. 1847.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 15. List of donations.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[12] *H.B.24*, p. 65, 16 Feb. 1866.
[13] *H.B.23*, p. 127, 25 April 1861.
[14] *H.B.23*, p. 252, 19 Dec. 1862; p. 344, 23 Feb. 1864.
[15] *H.B.23*, p. 357, 8 April 1864; p. 337.
[16] *H.B.25*, p. 98, 26 Oct. 1871.
[17] *H.B.26*, p. 138, 31 Aug. 1877.
[18] *H.B.26*, p. 204, 27 Sept. 1878.
[19] *H.B.26*, p. 163, 25 March 1878.
[20] *H.B.26*, p. 243, 28 March 1879.
[21] *H.B.26*, p. 400, 24 Feb. 1882.
[22] *H.B.26*, p. 407, 31 March 1882.
[23] *H.B.26*, p. 439, 27 Oct. 1882.
[24] *H.B.27*, p. 286, 29 March 1889.
[25] *H.B.27*, p. 440, 29 July 1892.
[26] *H.B.28*, p. 204, 29 Jan. 1897; p. 357, 25 May 1900.
[27] *H.B.28*, p. 303, 24 Feb. 1899.
[28] *H.B.14*, p. 9, 21 Jan. 1808.
[29] *H.B.22*, p. 175, 14 Aug. 1857.

£10 to the Park Row Asylum for Hopeful Discharged Female Prisoners in 1882;[30] £25 to Kingswood Reformatory in 1883;[31] 5 guineas to the Association of Helpers of the Poor in 1884;[32] 5 guineas to the Ladies' Home, Clifton, in 1885;[33] 10 guineas to the Children's Help Society in 1889 and a subscription of 5 guineas to the Bristol Blind Asylum.[34] In 1891, the Society contributed 5 guineas to the Mayoress' Fund "being raised by her for Reduced Ladies",[35] and in 1901 it gave £25 to help build a new Lost Dogs' Home.[36]

Throughout the nineteenth century, there was, of course, an acute problem of poverty, and in varying degrees and for various motives many of the wealthiest members of the community felt the need to take some action, particularly when economic fluctuations led to severe distress in a community which had no Social Security. The Society has a long record of miscellaneous donations of which only a few illustrations can be given here. In 1801, when prices were high, it gave £20 to a Soup Kitchen and 20 guineas to help the poor at Pill.[37] In 1829 it contributed £10 to Stogursey Charity Fund to provide coal, blankets and flannel for sale to the poor at half price,[38] and next year it gave £5 to Clifton parish to provide blankets, clothes, coal and potatoes,[39] and £10 to help the watermen at Pill.[40] On occasions, the Society tried to help with the problem of poverty by making available quarries at which the poor could be set to work.[41] In 1847, £21 was given to the poor at Pill and £15 to the poor of Stogursey to supply food at reduced rates in time of scarcity.[42] In the bad weather of 1855, when there was much unemployment, £20 was provided for relief for people employed on the quays and docks,[43] and in the bad weather of 1878 £100 was donated to provide coal for the poor.[44] Next year £50 was voted for Distress Relief and the Master was given discretion to contribute another £50.[45] The Mayor's Relief Fund for the distressed poor received £50 in 1881;[46] £60 was provided for coal for the poor in 1888,[47] and four years later £5 was given to each of the ten poorest parishes for the same purpose.[48]

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[30] *H.B.26*, p. 415, 28 April 1882.

[31] *H.B.27*, p. 14, 27 July 1883.

[32] *H.B.27*, p. 72, 24 Oct. 1884.

[33] *H.B.27*, p. 97, 27 Feb. 1885.

[34] *H.B.27*, p. 297, 28 June 1889.

[35] *H.B.27*, p. 381, 20 March 1891.

[36] *H.B.28*, p. 385, 25 Jan. 1901. 10 guineas had been given to help pay off the debt in 1896 (*H.B.28*, p. 152, 28 Feb. 1896).

[37] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 17.

[38] *H.B.16*, p. 364, 4 Dec. 1829.

[39] *H.B.16*, p. 368, 8 Jan. 1830.

[40] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 19.

[41] It made an arrangement with St. Augustine's parish in 1817 and with the Governors of St. Peter's Hospital in the later eighteen-twenties. *H.B.14*, p. 423, 28 Jan. 1817; *Letter Book IV, 1826–1833*, p. 50, 12 March 1827.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 123, 26 March 1827.

[43] *H.B.21*, pp. 460, 461, 9 March 1855.

[44] *H.B.26*, p. 230, 21 Dec. 1878.

[45] *H.B.26*, p. 233, 31 Jan. 1879.

[46] *H.B.26*, p. 340, 21 Jan. 1881.

[47] *H.B.27*, p. 240, 24 Feb. 1888.

[48] *H.B.27*, p. 423, 26 Feb. 1892.

The Society also made some contribution to helping the sick. Thus, in 1805, it donated £100 towards a new wing of the Bristol Infirmary, to which it gave an annual subscription.[49] A modest £5 was contributed to the cost of whitewashing houses at Pill in 1832 "at this period of alarm in respect to the Cholera",[50] and in 1849 £20 was given to the Committee for the Poor of Pill in time of cholera.[51] In 1844, 5 guineas were donated to the Parochial Medical Association for supplying medicine to the poor,[52] and £100 to the Infirmary in 1848 to help to provide two new wards to be known as Victoria and Albert.[53] When the Seamen's Hospital Fund was wound up in 1852, the Society recovered from the fund the £500 which it had donated in the mid-eighteenth century, and it gave half of this to the Bristol Infirmary and half to the General Hospital to help sick and disabled seamen.[54]

From time to time, the Society showed some concern about the finances of the Bristol Infirmary. In 1837 and 1849 it indicated that it might reduce or cancel its subscription.[55] In 1871, it voted £250 to help pay off the deficit, but hinted that it might withdraw its subscription unless there was a large increase in the number of annual subscribers.[56] Help to the Bristol General Hospital included a gift of £100 in 1871 and contributions of £200 and £500 to help pay off its debt in 1875 and 1883, and £1,000 for the extension of the hospital in 1891.[57] Other gifts included £50 to help complete the West of England Sanatorium at Weston-super-Mare in 1881;[58] £100 to extend the Bristol Eye Hospital in 1886, provided £1,500 was raised;[59] £25 for the hot sea baths at Weston-super-Mare sanatorium in 1889,[60] and £1,000 for the Jubilee Convalescent Home in 1897, provided £50,000 was raised.[61]

Assistance to individuals was much more limited, but there were a number of donations, particularly in the first half of the century, to those for whom the Society felt a special responsibility. Examples of such help include 15 guineas to a pilot's widow,[62] 15 guineas to a cranesman who lost his arm in 1810,[63] 10 guineas to a widow whose husband and eldest son had been drowned in a gale in 1815,[64] and £5 to help the crew of the wrecked *Columbus* to get back to London in 1825.[65]

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[49] *H.B.13*, p. 343, 4 Sept. 1805.

[50] *H.B.17*, p. 83, 7 March 1832.

[51] *H.B.21*, p. 22, 12 Oct. 1849.

[52] *H.B.19*, p. 415, 9 Feb. 1844.

[53] *H.B.20*, p. 438, 15 April 1848.

[54] *H.B.21*, pp. 242, 243, 10 Sept. 1852.

[55] *H.B.18*, p. 130, 8 Nov. 1837; *H.B.21*, p. 1, 11 May 1849.

[56] *H.B.25*, p. 113, 29 Dec. 1871.

[57] *H.B.25*, p. 113, 29 Dec. 1871; p. 385, 30 Jan. 1875; *H.B.27*, p. 11, 1 June 1883; p. 375, 30 Jan. 1891.

[58] *H.B.26*, pp. 359, 27 May 1881.

[59] *H.B.27*, p. 164, 1 May 1886.

[60] *H.B.27*, p. 284, 22 Feb. 1889.

[61] *H.B.28*, p. 214, 26 Feb. 1897. See Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals, 1887–1900*, pp. 57 ff. Subscriptions included £10,000 from Mr. H. O. Wills, £20,000 from Mr. E. D. Wills, and £5,000 from Mr. W. H. Wills.

[62] *H.B.14*, p. 118, 11 July 1810.

[63] *H.B.14*, p. 142, 28 Nov. 1810.

The main individual beneficiaries, however, were people very closely connected with the Society. In 1802, for example, a pension of £20 a year was voted to the widow of William Reeve, a member who died in indifferent circumstances.[66] £30 a year was granted in 1803 to Thomas Ricketts,[67] but a proposal in 1804 to give a pension of £20 a year to Mary Charleton, widow of Job Charleton, was not seconded, as her husband had unfortunately not taken up the freedom.[68] Proposals in 1818, 1821, and 1823 to give an annuity to Edward Thurston Davis were turned down on the grounds that he had never been a Master, Warden or Assistant, but he was eventually given a donation of £20.[69] In 1835 John Barrow, a former Master, was given a pension of £60 a year,[70] but when it was moved in 1844 that an annuity should be given to another former Master, Philip Protheroe, an amendment was carried that the question be not put.[71] William Claxton noted in his Journal that there had been discussion about Protheroe's misfortunes and bankruptcy, and that only three Past Masters had received annuities and "they were persons of unimpeachable character".[72] When William Taylor Chamberlain, who had been assistant to the Treasurer William Claxton since 1842, died in 1859, leaving a widow and 14 children with wholly insufficient means, the Society gave her £25 and agreed to consider the matter annually.[73] In 1871, a pension of £100 a year was granted to William Edward Acraman, formerly a merchant of high position in the city, who was now in advanced old age,[74] and a similar pension was given to William Bruce, a past Warden, now in distressing circumstances.[75] When William Claxton's son Donald died in 1887, his widow was given £100 a year, and when William Claxton's widow died in 1889, and her pension of £100 a year lapsed, Mrs.

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[64] *H.B.14*, p. 278, 18 Nov. 1813.

[65] *H.B.16*, p. 58, 3 June 1825.

[66] *H.B.13*, p. 194, 11 March 1802.

[67] *H.B.13*, p. 256, 22 Aug. 1803. He had been admitted in 1760, but had never served as Master.

[68] *H.B.13*, p. 310, 8 Nov. 1804.

[69] *H.B.14*, p. 505, 30 Oct. 1818; *H.B.15*, p. 164, 3 July 1821; p. 320, 3 June 1823.

[70] *H.B.17*, p. 350, 9 Nov. 1835.

[71] *H.B.20*, p. 12, 27 July 1844. He had been a member since 1803 and Master in 1826.

[72] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 92, 30 May 1844.

[73] *H.B.22*, p. 370, 11 Aug. 1859.

[74] *H.B.25*, p. 46, 14 April 1871. He had joined the Society in 1838.

[75] *H.B.25*, p. 56, 12 May 1871. He had joined the Society in 1820, and been Warden in 1823.

Donald Claxton's annuity was increased to £150 a year.[76] In 1888, when Edmund Gwyer, son of a former member and himself a Merchant Venturer since 1852, asked for assistance owing to his extreme poverty and serious illness, he was given £2 a week,[77] and in 1896 Robert Grey Barnes who had joined the Society in 1859, was given £5 a month because of his heavy trading losses. At the same time all pensioners were informed that they must not attend the Hall while they were receiving pensions.[78]

THE SEAMEN'S HOSPITAL FUND

In addition to giving donations and subscriptions, the Society was also concerned with the running of almshouses and the management of various charitable funds. One of the most important of these in the first half of the nineteenth century was the Seamen's Hospital Fund which had been established in 1747.[79] The original subscriptions towards the building of a hospital had been invested, and the fund was built up progressively from money collected from seamen's wages. The money had been put into Old South Sea Stock and by 1796 the value of the stock was £6,050.[80] By 1853 when the Society handed over the fund to the Board of Trade, the value of the fund was £12,902 18s. 9d.,[81] most of which had come from seamen's wages.

The work of collecting the money continued to be done on a commission basis. In 1814, when the Collector complained that £9 per cent was not enough, the commission was increased to 12½ per cent.[82] It was cut to 9 per cent in 1833 when the Fund was in difficulties,[83] but when legislation in 1834 had increased the contributions,[84] the commission on collection was restored to the earlier rate.[85]

There are a number of Journals and other records relating to this fund in the first half of the century which show the amount of money spent and the number of people receiving help. In 1799–1800, for example, £430 4s. 6d. was paid to 96 claimants, including 10 captains, 2 mates, 1 blind surgeon, 36 seamen of whom 15 were blind, and 25 widows claiming on behalf of 47 children.[86] In 1818–1819, 125 claimants received between them £533 7s.[87] The number of pensioners had risen to 181 in 1829–30 and the amount disbursed was £732 11s. 6d.[88] In 1843, 296 people received help amounting to £1,132 8s. 6d. apart from temporary relief and surgical assistance costing £27 0s. 4d. They included 11 masters receiving £10 a year each; 5 masters receiving £8 a year; 4 blind seamen receiving 3s. 6d. a week; 83 worn-out seamen receiving 2s. 6d.; 10 widows getting £8 5s. 4d. a year; 13 blind, crippled or orphan children receiving 1s. 6d. a week, and 74 widows claiming for 170 children who got 1s. a week each.[89]

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[76] *H.B.27*, p. 215, 30 Sept. 1887; p. 218, 29 Oct. 1887; p. 318, 20 Dec. 1889.

[77] *H.B.27*, p. 241, 23 March 1888.

[78] *H.B.28*, pp. 156, 159, 27 March 1896, 24 April 1896.

[79] See p. 197 ff.

[80] Merchants' Hall: *Hospital for Decayed Seamen 1787–1835*, fo. 1.

[81] Merchants' Hall: *Seamen's Hospital Ledger 1835–1852*, fo. 3. The nominal value of the Old South Sea Stock handed over was £15,286 12s. 3d.

[82] *H.B.14*, p. 315, 8 Nov. 1814.

[83] *H.B.17*, p. 161, 5 June 1833; p. 168, 4 Sept. 1833.

[84] 4 and 5 William IV c. 52. Merchant seamen were no longer required to contribute to the support of the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich and the Seamen's Hospital Fund now received 2s. od. per month from masters and 1s. od. from seamen.

[85] *H.B.19*, pp. 13 ff., 10 July 1840.

The Society administered the fund under authority given it by an Act of Parliament, but the question of how best to provide for disabled seamen was not merely a local one, and action by the central government on this matter inevitably brought under examination the somewhat exceptional situation in Bristol, particularly when reforming governments got to work after 1830. In 1833, the Society was required to make returns for the years 1830, 1831 and 1832 of the amount of money collected from seamen's wages.[90] Next year, Mr. Lyall brought in a bill for the relief of merchant seamen which proposed, among other things, to take the Bristol Fund away from the Society and to hand it over to a national body in London. Some words he used in the House seemed to suggest that the Society was receiving more money than it accounted for, but it appeared that he did not mean this, and the Society succeeded in getting itself restored as Trustee for the Bristol Fund on the third reading.[91] The threat recurred next year, and Mr. Fowler, who had been Master at the time of the 1834 bill, went to London and convinced the mover of the bill that the Society's work was beneficial and that it ought to continue.[92]

The threat reappeared in 1840 when a Commons Committee prepared to enquire into the Merchant Seamen's Fund, and the Society alerted the Bristol M.P.s.[93] The Select Committee wanted details of the Bristol Fund, and the Hall instructed its Collector, Mr. Stedder, to make the required return,[94] but no further action was taken by the House. Then, there was a lull until 1845 when another bill was brought in. The Hall sent a petition for Philip Miles, M.P., to present to the House, and despatched the Clerk to London to cooperate with others in opposing the bill,[95] which proposed to place the funds of all ports under a Corporation in London and to equalise pensions throughout the country. The Society's case was that this would deprive seamen of Bristol of their past contributions for the benefit of other ports "whose accumulated Funds have from mismanagement or other causes been exhausted and whose annual contributions from their Seamen have proved insufficient to maintain the Pensions allowed . . .". The new proposals (unlike the Bristol scheme) would make no provision for widows and children. Representatives of Liverpool, Bristol, Hull, Rye, Wexford, Plymouth and Colchester met at the Guildhall Coffee House, set up a committee and obtained a conference with the Board of Trade, but without effect. In the end, the bill was withdrawn, but the opponents of the bill decided to form a joint committee to remain on the alert.[96] Another bill was introduced in 1848, but the Hall decided that there was no need to take action, as it was unlikely to go through.[97]

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[86] *Seamen's Hospital Journal 1796–1830*, p. 11.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[89] *Seamen's Hospital Ledger 1835–1852*, p. 26.

[90] *H.B.17*, p. 180, 8 Nov. 1833.

[91] *H.B.17*, p. 200, 10 Jan. 1834; p. 236, 20 June 1834; p. 239, 2 July 1834; pp. 242 ff., 15 July 1834; p. 245, 6 Aug. 1834.

[92] *H.B.17*, p. 313, 6 June 1835; p. 314, 17 June 1835.

[93] *H.B.18*, p. 426, 13 March 1840; p. 430, 10 April 1840.

[94] *H.B.19*, pp. 9 ff., 10 July 1840. It was stated that the book of proceedings on the Trustees had been burnt or lost when the Customs House was destroyed in the Riots of 1831.

1850 saw the beginning of the end. A Merchant Seamen's Fund Bill proposed to divest the Society of the Bristol Fund, to set up a new general fund, and to make regulations which would not include provision for widows and orphans. The Hall instructed its Pilotage Committee to prepare a petition and to go to London to cooperate with Liverpool and Hull. Together with the Bristol M.P.s they had a three-hour discussion with Mr. Labouchere, President of the Board of Trade. He stood by the principle of the bill but admitted that some details were objectionable.[98] In its petition, the Society used the rather curious argument that by changing the fund from one intended to benefit destitute and decayed seamen's widows and children to one which would benefit the seamen alone, the bill established "a Precedent upon which other classes of operatives may found Claims upon the government and Funds of the country for the establishment of similar societies for their own benefit . . .". The Hall argued that the seamen themselves did not want the new scheme which would increase the compulsory deductions from their wages and which made no statutory provision for grants to widows and orphans. It thought that the reference in the bill to a voluntary fund for widows and orphans was an illusion at a time when compulsory contributions were being increased by half as much again and when the repeal of the Navigation Acts and increased foreign competition made it unlikely that seamen's wages would be increased. Further, the new proposal would be much more expensive to administer, as it involved paid officials instead of local voluntary trustees, and it would give a lot of patronage to the government. Although the petitioners would continue as trustees, they would have no control over the collection, disbursement or management of the fund which would be managed by government officers "without check or control". The Society argued that it had kept the accounts and managed the fund gratuitously, that it had contributed some of its own money and that it had built up a stock of £15,000. The proposal that they should now hand it over "cast an undeserved slur upon their characters as indicating they are not longer held worthy of being entrusted with its custody". The money belonged to the seamen and it was unfair that others should benefit from it and widows and orphans should cease to receive help.[99]

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[95] *H.B.20*, p. 115, 5 June 1845.

[96] *H.B.20*, pp. 123 ff., 11 July 1845.

[97] *H.B.20*, p. 393, 15 July 1848.

[98] *H.B.21*, p. 51, 15 March 1850; p. 55, 12 April 1850; p. 63, 14 June 1850.

The bill of 1850 was withdrawn, but the matter came up again next year. In July 1851, the Treasurer, William Claxton, and the collector of the Fund, Mr. Stedder, were sent to London to consult P. W. Miles, M.P. on the best way to stop the Bristol Fund being appropriated by the government. Miles told them that unless they could persuade Mr. Labouchere to make an exception for Bristol on the grounds that the Fund was to a great extent attributable to the gifts of Bristol benefactors and of the Society, it would not be possible. He added gloomily that most M.P.s had left town and that of the few who remained the greatest part were "Members devoted to the Government Interest and remaining in Town principally for the purpose of securing the passing of Government measures". The deputation waited on Mr. Labouchere, but he refused to modify the bill. On 8 August 1851, the Society's Clerk reported the passing of the Act, and a committee was instructed to examine the Society's position.[100]

Early in 1852, the committee reported that the Society held Old South Sea Stock to the value of £15,800, and it was ordered that this be transferred to the Board of Trade, less £500 donated by the Society in 1754.[101] The Board of Trade was in no hurry to take over, and in November the Society was urging it to get on with the business.[102] The matter was not finally concluded until 11 March 1853.[103]

The epitaph on the seamen's Hospital Fund was written by

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[99] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 218 ff., 5 June 1850.

[100] *H.B.21*, p. 155, 8 Aug. 1851. The Act (14 and 15 Victoria c. 102) did in fact make provision for widows and children.

[101] *H.B.21*, p. 213, 13 Feb. 1852; p. 221, 12 March 1852; p. 225, 2 April 1852, *Seamen's Hospital Ledger 1835–1852*, p. 5.

[102] *H.B.21*, pp. 272, 273, 20 Nov. 1852.

[103] *Seamen's Hospital Ledger 1835–1852*, p. 5.

William Claxton who remarked that "During these years the records of the Society and of the Merchant Seamens Hospital shew that in all particulars the Fund has been most faithfully administered, every applicant whether man woman or child receiving due consideration and the Bounty dispensed in accordance with the several Acts of Parliament now repealed. The accounts have been kept without charge of any kind and the Society have expended many Hundreds of Pounds in defence of the wives and orphans of decayed seamen. At the conclusion of their Trust they have paid over to the Board of Trade the sum of £12,873 3s. 1d. sterling Money in South Sea Annuities £15286 – a fact unprecedented in the Management of all other Seamens Hospital Trusts in the Kingdom. In fact the Bristol Trust was the only one which had any funds to transfer."[104] Claxton was not, of course, unprejudiced and he may have been mesmerised by the amount which had been accumulated from seamen's wages. It could be argued that larger pensions might have been paid to the seamen and their dependants, but generally speaking his comment did justice to the work which the Society had done in administering the fund.

THE MERCHANT VENTURERS' ALMSHOUSE

No very dramatic developments took place in the history of the Merchants' Almshouse in King Street during this period, although as has been noted elsewhere, a substantial donation to the Society enabled the weekly allowances to the almsfolk to be increased.[105]

Up to 1841, the Standing Committee and the Treasurer exercised general supervision and made annual inspections,[106] but in that year the Hall decided to appoint a visiting Committee of 5 members elected annually.[107] The Minutes of this committee throw interesting light on conditions in the almshouse in the years 1841–74.[108] There were the usual disciplinary troubles. In January 1842, for example, the Chief Brother had to be told firmly that inmates might not have outsiders sleeping in their rooms. The water closet was found to be improperly used by persons not in the almshouse and a lock was put on the door with a key in every woman's room. A Mrs. Scriffen was thought to be guilty of theft and of bringing outsiders into her room and was removed to No. 13.[109] She continued to give trouble and her pay was stopped until she moved to her new room. Then the Chief

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[105] See pp. 403–4.

[106] See, for example, *H.B.14*, p. 205, 28 May 1812; p. 537, 4 March 1819; *H.B.18*, p. 401, 26 Nov. 1839.

[107] *H.B.19*, p. 122, 22 May 1841.

[108] Two volumes covering 1841–52 and 1852–74.

[109] *Minutes of the Visiting Committee 1841–1852*, 18 Jan. 1842.

Brother reported that Mr. Earle, surgeon to the Dispensary, had said that "she had taken a violent cold in consequence of the Room being damp", and the committee assigned her to Room 12.[110] In March she was asked not to let her daughter sleep in her room.[111] In June, the Elder Brother complained of her abusive conduct, and the Visiting Committee decided that as they had reprimanded her many times, she must be reported to the Hall.[112] After listening to her statement and to a statement from the Chief Brother, the Hall decided that the case against her of "disorderly and abusive conduct" was proved, and she was expelled.[113] The Society seems to have acted with great patience in dealing with a difficult inmate. Shortly afterwards the Chief Brother reported that "the Almshouse was remarkably quiet".[114]

The Visting Committee set up in 1841 took its job very seriously under the direction of the Treasurer, William Claxton, who was keenly interested. In July 1842 it asked the Master to get a contract for painting the almshouse," the same not having been done for thirty years.[115] The estimate was £65 and the work was started immediately.[116] In October, the committee reported that it had visited the almshouse once a month and had at first found it "in a very uncomfortable state", but the committee had achieved much good and the almsfolk were now living "peacefully, orderly and lovingly together". The interior and exterior had been painted, and this had given great satisfaction. One of the inmates had gone blind and had been sent to St. Peter's Hospital, but her weekly pay had been continued. They proposed an addition of 1s. a week to the pay of 5s. received by the Chief Brother since it was a full-time job and he could not earn additions to his pay like other almsfolk.[117]

Naturally, problems continued to arise. In January 1843, the committee noted that inconvenience and disturbance arose because of the male inmates having female visitors every day for the whole day. The Elder Brother was to tell them of the committee's disapproval.[118] In May two men were fined for not attending church on Sundays, and in June William Lewis, who was reported to be in the habit of assembling a congregation on Sundays in his room for praying and singing hymns, was told to stop because he was "disturbing the Harmony of the House".[119]

The general impression left by a study of the Minutes is that the Visiting Committee managed the almshouse with a mixture of firmness and understanding. When the Chief Brother reported that Prudence Brick kept her room in a very dirty state and used abusive language, the Visiting Committee inspected it and found it disgraceful. It also appeared that six months earlier the ceiling of the room below had been damaged by her emptying water and improper things into the coal hole and that she had persisted in doing so after the Treasurer had spoken to her. She was merely moved to another room and told not to do it again.[120] In 1844, the Visiting Committee reported that it had opened a communication from the almshouse into the Merchants' Hall garden and that the almsfolk would be able to use the garden after the winter.[121] When the Chief Brother was away for a week in 1846, the Treasurer visited the almshouse daily and found much that needed amendment. As a result of this, he was subjected to "very improper conduct from the Chief Brother", but the committee merely issued a reprimand.[122] Next year, there was a report on the "indifference to cleanliness manifested by the Inmates (with some few exceptions)". More care was to be taken in future in selecting applicants "to raise the Character of the House",[123] and this paid dividends, for in 1849 the committee was able to report "all have been by God's gracious Providence preserved from the Cholera".[124]

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[110] *Ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1842.

[111] *Ibid.*, 7 March 1842.

[112] *Ibid.*, 6 June 1842.

[113] *Ibid.*, 6 June 1842; 4 July 1842; *H.B.19*, p. 249, 10 June 1842.

[114] *Minutes of the Visiting Committee 1841–1852*, 1 Aug. 1842.

[115] *Ibid.*, 4 July 1842.

[116] *Ibid.*, 5 Sept. 1842.

[117] *Ibid.*, 24 Oct. 1842.

[118] *Ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1843.

[119] *Ibid.*, 12 June 1843.

Other illustrations of the humane attitude of the committee were the permission granted to the Chief Brother to let his granddaughter stay at night since his infirmities were so great that this was "absolute necessity";[125] a grant of 5 cwt. of coal to each of the inhabitants in the inclement weather of 1861;[126] the indulgence shown to Captain Robert Bartlett who had "extremely filthy habits" and who was allowed to live with his sister and collect his weekly pay from the office "rather than throw him upon the world in poverty";[127] and the replacement of stone floors by wooden ones in 1870.[128] On the other hand, Thomas Gwyer was expelled in 1879 on account of his dirty habits,[129] and in 1889 one of the almsmen who had taken a woman into his room and slept with her all night to the annoyance of the other inmates was also expelled.[130]

It is not really possible to say how conditions in the Merchants' Almshouse compared with those in other almshouses. Up to 1864, the inmates of Colston's Almshouse received more pay than those in the Merchants' Almshouse.[131] It may be significant that in October 1864 the Visiting Committee was considering whether it ought not to make more places available for women since there were no applications from men and 25 for the first female vacancy.[132] After the increase of pay under a Scheme of the Commissioners of Charitable Trusts in 1866,[133] the committee noticed a much greater demand for places from masters and mates.[134]

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[120] *Ibid.*, 4 June 1844.

[121] *Ibid.*, 10 Nov. 1844.

[122] *Ibid.*, 26 Oct. 1846.

[123] *Ibid.*, 2 Nov. 1847.

[124] *Ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1849.

[125] *Minutes of the Visiting Committee 1852–1874*, 4 Jan. 1852.

[126] *Ibid.*, 1 Jan. 1861.

[127] *Ibid.*, 28 Oct. 1864. When the Chief Brother was reported to the Treasurer for inebriety in 1867, he was reprimanded but not dismissed (*ibid.*, 5 March 1867).

[128] *Ibid.*, Report of the Committee, 1870.

[129] *H.B.26*, p. 265, 23 Sept. 1879.

[130] *H.B.27*, p. 298, 26 July 1889.

In 1898, a new Scheme for the management of the Merchants' Almshouse was brought into operation which placed the funds on an independent footing.[135]

COLSTON'S ALMSHOUSE

Colston's Almshouse, like the Merchant Venturers' Almhouse, does not figure very much in the Society's records until the establishment of the Visiting Committee in 1841.[136] The Visiting Committee made its first report to the Standing Committee in 1842 and stated that it was meeting monthly and keeping a Book of Proceedings. It solemnly noted that "your Committee have regularly attended Divine Service at the Chapel of the Alms House with the Alms People and they believe that a good effect has been produced thereby". The book kept to mark attendance at chapel showed that since the committee was appointed, attendance of the almsfolk had been extremely regular. The painting of the interior was in a bad state and had not been done for at least thirty years. Instructions were given to paint the whole of the exterior as well as the interior. The committee evidently had some doubt about whether Edward Colston's intentions of providing only for sound members of the Church of England were being carried out and thought a searching enquiry should be made into the Religious Tenets of all future applicants. A mere certificate that the applicant had once attended the celebration of Holy Communion should not suffice.[137]

In 1870, there were 11 men in the almshouse with an average age of just over 77 and 16 women with an average age of just over 70.[138]

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[131] Merchants' Hall: Box 21, envelope marked "Merchants, Almshouse—Six Poor Mariners 1864/5".

[132] *Minutes of the Visiting Committee 1852–1874*, 28 Oct. 1864.

[133] *Ibid.*, Report of Visiting Committee 1866.

[134] *Ibid.*, Report of Visiting Committee, 1867.

[135] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 279.

[136] *H.B.19*, p. 112, 22 May 1841. Among the Society's archives are two volumes of *Proceedings of the Sub-Committee of Colston's Almshouse No. 2* (*1852–1870*) and *No. 3* (*1870–1874*). Only 26 pages of the last volume have been used and the rest are blank.

[137] *H.B.19*, p. 296, 7 November 1842.

[138] *Proceedings of the Sub-Committee of Colston's Almshouse No. 3*. list of inmates at 10 Nov. 1870.

The high average age is relevant to a touching letter sent to the trustees by the inmates in 1869 requesting that the almshouse should be kept open until 9 o'clock in the winter as well as in the summer. It stated "we are all far advanced in age and this with our rapid increasing infirmities render us more and more incapable of keeping our rooms so nice and tidy as we could wish. Many of us have friends and relatives engaged all day with their own concerns who would willingly look in of an evening to see us, and put our rooms a little to rights at the same time but are prevented from doing so by an early closing."[139]

In this almshouse too, the Society showed humanity in its treatment of the inmates. In 1856, for example, the Treasurer reported that "in consequence of a severe fright occasioned by an alarming fit happening to her son who had called to see her, which occasioned his death in a few hours, Mrs. Frances Pearce has been rendered imbecile and quite incapable of attending to herself . . .". Her daughter-in-law was willing to receive her into her own house and to nurse and attend her there, but her family duties prevented her from being with her mother-in-law in the almshouse. Permission was given for Mrs. Pearce to be removed to her daughter-in-law's house and for support to be continued to her there.[140] When there was a request that a Mrs. Taylor's niece should be allowed to sleep in her room in the almshouse, the Treasurer conferred with the surgeon in the Dispensary who said it was dangerous for Mrs. Taylor to be on her own, and permission was accordingly granted.[141] In the severe weather at the end of 1860, the Master, Wardens; and Treasurer asked the inmates what would be most acceptable to them, and the reply was "some warm stockings". The Treasurer was then ordered to supply two pairs to each of the almsfolk at the expense of the Society, and two letters of thanks were duly received from "the Female inmates" and "the male Inmates".[142] When the Prince of Wales was married in 1863, an illuminated dolphin was fixed at the entrance gate, ½ lb of tea and 2 lb of sugar were given to each inmate, as well as 2s. in money. Everyone had a wedding favour at the cost of the Trustees.[143]

In 1868/9 by arrangement with the Charity Commissioners four new rooms were built at a cost of £600 and some of the surplus funds of the charity were used for other charitable purposes.[144]

[139] Letters of 28 Oct. 1869 with 24 names (some inmates putting their marks) stuck on to the front inside cover of *Proceedings of the Sub-Committee, No. 2* (*1852–1870*).

[140] *Proceedings of the Sub-Committee, No. 2*, 22 Dec. 1856.

[141] *Ibid.*, 28 June 1858.

[142] *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 1860.

[143] *Ibid.*, 24 Feb. 1863.

[144] *Ibid.*, 5 Feb. 1869 and Report of the Visiting Committee, 25 Oct. 1869.

HILL'S ALMSHOUSE

In 1866, the Society became involved in the affairs of a third almshouse established by Thomas William Hill for 12 poor seamen's widows. At Hill's request, the Society agreed to give a piece of land near Berkeley Place. Management was in the hands of 12 trustees, but the Society had visitorial powers and could nominate to six of the places. The almshouse was opened in 1869 and the first visitation of the Committee of the Society of Merchant Venturers was on 11 August of that year when the Rules were read, the rooms inspected and the Chief Sister instructed by the Treasurer in her duties. The Treasurer stated that although the government was entirely in the hands of the trustees, he would always be pleased to help with advice. When Mr. Hill died in 1874, he left a large estate which was used to provide pensions of 5s. a week to women outside the almshouse.[145]

THE ALMSFOLK CHARITY

Another charity with which the Society was concerned in the nineteenth century was one to increase the weekly payments to old people in the almshouses. In 1810, Richard Reynolds, Philip John Miles and others had endeavoured to collect about £35,000 in order to raise the payment to 5s. a week. They managed to collect only £12,257, and with this they purchased three estates in Monmouth and Somerset. The post-war drop in land values and rents after 1815 had a disastrous effect on the income, and it was impossible to carry out the plan. In 1834, the surviving trustees William Fripp and Thomas Sanders suggested handing over the properties in trust to the Society. They calculated that it would cost £331 10s. a year to increase the pay in Colston's and in six other almshouses to 5s. a week, and another £156 a year to deal with the Merchants' Almshouse. Of the receipts from the estates amounting to more than £487 10s. a year, the surplus was to go towards increasing the number of places in the Merchants' Almshouse.[146] The Standing Committee recommended accepting the offer, but it was apparently not possible to make satisfactory arrangements, and no futher action was taken at the time.

In 1839, Messrs. Fripp and George made a proposal to hand over to the Society sufficient stock to increase to 5s. a week the pay of 18 men and 12 women in the Merchants' Almshouse and 11 men and 12 women in Colston's Almshouse, but they laid down certain conditions.[147] There were lengthy negotiations, and eventually the trustees handed over to the Society's trustees £3,350 stock for the Merchants' Almshouse and £1,700 for Colston's Almshouse.[148] On 31 March 1840, representatives of the Society went with Alderman Fripp to the Merchants' Almshouse and to Colston's to inform the inmates of their increased allowances, which were backdated to 9 January.[149]

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[145] For Hill's Almshouse, see *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 54, 5 Jan. 1867; *Hill's Almshouse Book* beginning 22 April 1869 and continuing up to 29 May 1951; *H.B.24*, p. 76, 17 April 1866; p. 91, 15 June 1866; *H.B.27*, p. 31, 30 Nov. 1883; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 277.

[146] *H.B.17*, pp. 200 ff., 10 Jan. 1834.

In fact, the yield from the investments dropped continually in the nineteenth century and the Society itself made good the deficiency in order to maintain and increase the payments to the almsfolk.[150]

FUND FOR DISABLED SEAMEN

One other fund with which the Society was involved in the early nineteenth century can be noted briefly. In 1817, a National Committee for Managing the Subscription for the relief of British prisoners of war, which had been raised during the Napoleonic War, decided to allocate to Bristol the sum of £500 for the relief of sick, maimed and disabled seamen in the merchant service. The Society was given the management of the money, and in the years that followed there are a number of references in its records to the grants which it made.[151]

It is not really possible to assess the importance of the Society's philanthropic work because there has as yet been no study of the total amount of such activity in nineteenth-century Bristol and the relationship it bore to the needs of the community. The amount of money which the Society provided from its own resources was comparatively small, as was its income, but it is clear that it was interested in a great variety of good works and that some of its members gave a great deal of time and thought not only to the Society's own charities but to the various other charities for which it acted as trustee.

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[147] *H.B.18*, p. 324, 10 May 1839; p. 344, 12 July 1839.

[148] *H.B.18*, p. 423, 13 March 1840; p. 428, 31 March 1840; *H.B.20*, pp. 278, 280, 23 Dec. 1846.

[149] *H.B.18*, p. 428, 31 March 1840. See also *H.B.19*, p. 31, 30 Sept. 1840; p. 92, 12 March 1841.

[150] Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, p. 279.

[151] *H.B.14*, p. 442, 23 May 1817. For some of the grants, see *H.B.14*, p. 449, 11 July 1817; p. 475, 9 Feb. 1818; *H.B.15*, p. 3, 3 June 1819; p. 53, 7 Jan. 1820.

CHAPTER 22

Miscellaneous Activities in the Nineteenth Century

IN the nineteenth century the Society continued to be concerned with a variety of other business, local and national, in addition to those activities which have already been examined.

LOYAL ADDRESSES AND STATEMENTS ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Merchant Venturers as one of the oldest corporations in the City of Bristol felt they had a duty from time to time to express their sentiments on matters of public interest, and on many royal occasions they made their dignified voice heard in Loyal Addresses and other public declarations.

Thus, on 22 May 1800 the Society congratulated the King on his escape from the late atrocious attack on his life.[1] Two years later it sent him a Loyal Address on the happy termination of hostilities with France and conferred the freedom on the Prime Minister, Henry Addington.[2] Next year, it congratulated the King on the timely detection of traitorous designs of deluded men who had dared to conspire against him,[3] and the renewal of the war with Napoleon called for yet another Loyal Address.[4] On the last occasion, only 9 members were present, and only 11 turned up at the end of the year when the Hall resolved "at this momentous Crisis in defence of the King and Constitution" to give 100 guineas to the Bristol Royal Volunteer Infantry, 50 guineas to the Bristol Royal Light Horse Volunteers. 50 guineas to the Bristol Sea Fencibles and 50 guineas to the Clifton Volunteer Infantry.[5]

Trafalgar in 1805 led to a Congratulatory Address to the King, and it seemed a suitable occasion to bestow the freedom on Admirals Barham and Collingwood.[6] Then there was a period of quiescence until 1812 when the Hall sent a strong petition to the Lords urging the continuance of the Orders in Council,[7] and a Loyal Address after the murder of the Prime Minister, Spencer Percival, "most cruelly hurried out of existence by the hand of an assassin". Copies were ordered to be printed in the *Courier*, the *Globe*, and all Bristol papers.[8]

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[1] *Book of Petitions*, p. 129, 22 May 1800.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 130, 10 May 1802.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 131, 5 March 1803; *H.B.13*, p. 244, 5 March 1803 (only 11 present).

[4] *H.B.13*, p. 252, 1 July 1803.

[5] *H.B.13*, p. 285, 27 December 1803. When the Clifton Volunteers asked for more in 1807, no money was forthcoming (*H.B.13*, p. 462, 12 Oct. 1807).

[6] *Book of Petitions*, p. 136, 28 Nov. 1805; *H.B.13*, p. 360, 28 Nov. 1805 (20 present).

At the end of 1813, when Wellington and the allied forces in Europe were pushing Napoleon back, the 11 members who attended a General Hall on 3 December were moved to send an Address to the Prince Regent congratulating him on the successes when "France, defeated and dismayed, is returning in precipitate disorder within her ancient Boundaries" and when "the illustrious Deliverer of Spain and Portugal, after a career of the most splendid Victories has planted his Standard in her Territories . . .". Copies were sent to the M.P.s for Bristol and to the Bristol papers.[9]

The end of the war in 1814 moved the Society to the heights of rhetoric. The 9 members present on 13 June noted with patriotic fervour that "In the most alarming crisis of the War, when all the Nations of the Continent, were either at the foot of the Tyrant, or enlisted under his Banners in an unholy and unnatural league against their own happiness and independence, this Country alone remained, amidst the general desolation, erect and undismayed – the last hope and sole support of a sinking world. . . . But," it went on, ". . . rekindled by our breath, the sacred flame of Liberty again burst forth and spread with resistless force over the whole face of the Continent. . . .

"After a dark and gloomy night of anarchy and Rebellion, Despotism and Military Usurpation, the clouds which so long obscured our political Horizon are dispersed; the storm that raged with such destructive fury is passed away, and the Dawn of a brighter and happier Era beams upon the astonished view and reviving hope of Europe, as yet scarcely recovering from the miseries of her Thraldom." It was only proper to inform the Prince Regent that "those Princely qualities of Wisdom and fortitude, decision and Energy of mind displayed by your Royal Highness in the most critical and momentous emergencies will be held up, in all the splendor of deserved Eulogium, to the applause and admiration of succeeding Ages".[10] After that, Napoleon's escape from Elba must have come as a shock, and Waterloo did not receive the same treatment, but when the Duke of Wellington visited Bristol in 1816, it was decided to confer the freedom on him and to present it in a gold box costing approximately £70.[11]

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[7] See p. 286.

[8] *H.B.14*, p. 200, 16 May 1812 (18 present); *Book of Petitions*, p. 139, 18 May 1812.

[9] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 148, 149 (entered out of chronological order): *H.B.14*, p. 286, 3 Dec. 1813.

[10] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 146–7; *H.B.16*, p. 300, 13 June 1814.

In the post-war years, the royal family continued to receive attention. In 1818, the Hall sent its condolences to the Prince Regent on the death of Queen Charlotte,[12] and in 1820 15 members turned up to approve addresses of condolence on the death of George III and congratulations on the accession of George IV. A problem of etiquette arose, and the Master wrote to Richard Hart Davis, M.P. asking what was the proper procedure for "a Corporation which though of the greatest antiquity and respectability is not the senior Corporation of the City". He added that the Society had no wish to send up a Special Deputation unless propriety required it. Davis consulted Lord Sidmouth who thought it to be "a mere question of Feeling". If presented by the M.P.s, it would be quicker; if presented by a deputation for the Society, it would be "a greater manifestation of respect", but either course would be sufficiently respectful. Following precedents at the accession of George II and George III, the Hall decided against a special delegation.[13]

Of much greater concern in the post-war years was the problem of public order. In 1817, a Loyal Address to the Prince Regent regretted "the late violent and atrocious attack on his person".[14] In 1819, another Address was proposed "expressive of their abhorrence of the measures which are taking by wicked and designing men to seduce the common people from their obedience to the Laws . . .". Richard Bright moved an amendment, but it was not seconded, and the original motion was carried with one dissenting voice in a Hall of 18 members.[15]

The Address of 1819 is worth quoting as showing the outlook of the Hall at this time. The Society affirmed its attachment to the Constitution in Church and State, and it went on: "We have observed, with the utmost indignation, the continuance of that formidable system of operations, by which a set of evil disposed Persons (few, we hope, in number, but most dangerous in their Principles) are endeavouring to seduce the lower Orders of the People from their obedience to the Laws and to drive them, under pretence of petitioning for Reform, into a state of actual Rebellion." It continued: "Aware that to the accomplishment of their traitorous designs, the influence of Religion opposed the strongest obstacle, these shameless Impostors have not hesitated to attack Christianity itself. In aid of the seditious effusions of the weekly and daily Press, Publications fraught with Impiety and Blasphemy have with the utmost industrious activity, and in every variety of form best adapted to the understanding of the lower class of society, been circulated throughout the land. The effects produced by this fearful combination of Atheism and Treason, as exhibited in the seditious assembling of the People, in their previous military Trainings, in the appointment of Delegates to represent them in Parliament and in the studied and systematic insults offered to all civil Authorities, are of too formidable a nature to be viewed without Alarm." However, the Hall relied on the paternal care of his Royal Highness to ensure that every measure would be adopted in the present crisis for the salvation of the country, either by enforcing existing laws or enacting new ones.[16]

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[11] *H.B.14*, p. 400, 25 July 1816; pp. 402, 410, 25 July 1816 and 8 Nov. 1816. For the address to the Duke and his reply, see *ibid.*, p. 416.

[12] *Book of Petitions*, pp. 150, 151, Dec. 1818.

[13] *H.B.15*, p. 68, 14 Feb. 1820 (15 present). For the Addresses, see *ibid.*, pp. 72, 73.

[14] *H.B.14*, p. 433, 12 Feb. 1817.

[15] *H.B.15*, p. 33, 13 Oct. 1819. Richard Bright had become a Merchant Venturer in 1775. In 1779, when a motion was introduced offering full support to the King against the American colonists, Joseph Harford and Richard Bright had moved an amendment asking the King to change his ministers. The amendment was defeated by a majority of 3. Bright topped the poll as Whig candidate in 1820. He had been proposed by another Merchant Venturer, W. P. Lunell.

A year later, in November 1820, 39 members turned up to vote another Loyal Address on the same lines. The resolution stated that "at this season of public ferment and agitation . . . we deeply deplore the continuance and progress of that alarming System of operations, by which a wicked and desperate Faction, Enemies of all Government, are labouring to destroy the Constitution and to plunge the Country into the Abyss of Anarchy and Confusion . . . No Establishments, however venerable or holy, have escaped their malignant attacks. The Courts of Justice, the Parliament, the Throne, and the Altar have been alike the object of their licentious abuse. Religion has been vilified in the Person of its Ministers, the venerable Judges calumniated and menaced, the Constitution and Authority of the Houses of Parliament impeached, and the sacred Majesty of the Throne reviled, insulted and defiled."

It went on to say that "To corrupt the Morals of the People, as the surest road to the accomplishment of their ultimate object, has been of late a main and prominent feature of their daring Conspiracy. For this purpose any public Measure involving the honor of the Country has been traduced and misrepresented; all respect for virtue and purity of character has been treated with contempt, until at length we have seen Immorality not defended merely, but boldly held up to public Admiration and Applause. Nor is it to be wondered at, that they who commenced by scoffing at Religion should conclude the open Advocates of Profligacy and Vice."

In such circumstances, the duty of the Society was clear – "when

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[16] *Book of Petitions*, p. 154, Oct. 1819.

Sedition and Infidelity are thus actively at work, to look on in silent indifference were criminal. We are led by every sense of Duty to our King, our Country and our God, to declare our determination to rally round the Throne in defence of the Monarchy against the rude attacks of domestic Enemies and in support of our Laws, our Liberties and our Lives."

These were the strong words of High Toryism. They were apparently too strong for two of the 39 Merchant Venturers present on this occasion. William Peter Lunell moved, and Richard Bright seconded, an amendment which would have deleted much of the Address and substituted a more moderate expression of concern at the agitation then prevailing, while assuring the King of the Society's firm attachment to his person and government. The amendment was defeated and the original motion was carried.[17]

A different kind of crisis arose in 1825 when several gentlemen attended the Hall and suggested that "at this moment of extraordinary pressure on the Banks occasioned by the unfortunate alarm which has been so mischievously excited in the public mind", it would be very desirable for the Society to issue a Declaration of Confidence in the Commercial and Banking Establishments of the City. A declaration was drawn up and a deputation sent to the Mayor, John Haythorne. He refused to sign, but the Master, Abraham Hilhouse, agreed to put his name at the top, and the declaration was printed and circulated as a handbill.[18]

When George III died in 1830, only 10 members attended to vote the address of condolence and of congratulation to the new King, William IV. The Mayor and the two sheriffs were presenting an address on behalf of the City, and as both the sheriffs were Merchant Venturers, it was decided that the civic deputation should be asked to present the Society's address as well.[19]

After the traumatic experience of the Bristol Riots in 1831, there was considerable criticism of the Corporation and fierce controversy about liability for compensation as well as about the question of establishing an effective police force.[20] On 19 March 1832, 9 members were present at the Hall which considered two bills which the Corporation proposed to introduce into Parliament for paying compensation and for establishing a police force. The Hall gave its approval in principle. The Master then left the chair and the Hall resolved unanimously to give great praise to the Committee of

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[17] For the Address in full, see *H.B.15*, p. 124, 28 Nov. 1820. For the amendment, see *ibid.*, p. 128, 28 Nov. 1820.

[18] *H.B.16*, p. 108, 20 Dec. 1825. The cost of printing was £14 9s. 0d. (*ibid.*, p. 112, 4 Jan. 1826).

[19] *H.B.16*, pp. 401, 403, 22 July 1830; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 181, 182.

[20] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 178 ff.

Gentlemen who were trying to prepare for a friendly understanding between the citizens and the Corporation.[21] The chairman of the Committee was Daniel Cave, a Merchant Venturer. It seems that the Society was basically supporting the Corporation but at the same time trying to do something to lower the temperature in a situation which had become highly inflammable owing to the die-hard attitude of the Corporation.[22]

More royal occasions followed. In 1832, 10 members were present to vote a Loyal Address to William IV after "the late atrocious attack on his Majesty's person at Ascot".[23] Five years later, only 11 turned up to vote an address of condolence to Queen Adelaide and of congratulation to Queen Victoria on her accession.[24] Victoria's coronation in 1838 occasioned an insult by the City to the Society. Preparations were made to illuminate the Hall and Colston's Hospital,[25] but there was delay in receiving an invitation to walk in the Coronation Procession. On 23 June, the Master stated that he had not had any communication from the Mayor addressed to him personally, and it was decided that the Society could not join in. The dignity of the Hall had been offended because the Mayor had sent only a printed letter addressed to the Clerk.[26] On 27 June, however, there was a Special General Meeting attended by only 4 members to consider the invitation, which had now been received. The Clerk explained that although the letter was dated 21 June, it had not arrived until 25 June just before the Master left Bristol. The Master regretted that he could not now join in. The Hall directed the Clerk to call a special meeting for 28 June and those who turned up joined the Procession.[27]

The marriage of Victoria and Albert in 1840 called for two more Loyal Addresses, and the Master and Wardens went to London to present them.[28] The Address to the Queen stated that the marriage "holds the fairest prospect of domestic comfort and felicity" and "has given to the Country another most exalted, and we rejoice to think, most powerful Defender of those Protestant Principles which placed the Sceptre of the Realm in the hands of your Majesty's most illustrious Ancestors; and on the maintenance of which depends the security of the Throne itself, as well as of all our most valued Institutions in Church and State". The deputation attended the Queen's levée and next day presented an Address to Albert who acknowledged the mark of attention and regard from "so important and respectable a Body as the Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol".[29]

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[21] *H.B.17*, p. 88, 19 March 1832.

[22] *H.B.17*, p. 96, 9 April 1832; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 180; Susan Thomas, *The Bristol Riots*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1974; G. W. A. Bush, "The Old and the New: The Corporation of Bristol 1820–1851, unpublished Bristol Ph.D. thesis, 1965.

[23] *H.B.17*, p. 107, 26 June 1832; *Book of Petitions*, p. 185.

[24] *H.B.18*, pp. 75, 77, 78, 6 July 1837.

[25] *H.B.18*, p. 197, 16 June 1838; p. 208, 23 June 1838. The Committee was instructed not to spend more than £25.

[26] *H.B.18*, p. 209, 23 June 1838.

[27] *H.B.18*, p. 211, 27 June 1838; p. 212, 28 June 1838 (number not given).

[28] *H.B.18*, pp. 419 ff., 15 Feb. 1840.

Within a few months of this happy occasion, the 14 members who were present on the Hall on 18 June 1840 were moved to address the Queen and Prince Consort on the recent alarming attempt on their lives and to express "their horror and indignation at the atrocious attempt", adding for full measure "It was felt to be a national disgrace that any Individual should have been found, in Your Majesty's Dominions, capable of forming even the conception of so atrocious an Act."[30]

The birth of a Princess at the end of 1840 produced Loyal Addresses to Victoria, to Albert and to the Duchess of Kent,[31] and within less than a year there were similar addresses when the queen gave birth to a son. It was, perhaps, a little unfortunate to refer in the Address to "the future and we trust distant day" when the sceptre would pass to "a Prince trained up under your Majesty's fostering care in religious attachment to the Principle of our Constitution in Church and State".[32]

Another princess was born in 1842, and as the Master was too ill to go to London, an Address was sent through the Duke of Beaufort.[33] A little later, there was another attempt on the Queen's life, and the 7 members present at the Hall on 10 June 1842 produced an expression of horror which was possibly intended to compensate in strength for the small attendance. The Queen was assured that "It was with mingled Feelings of shame, grief and indignation that we received the appalling Intelligence. With difficulty could we believe it possible that in a Country so noted for its loyalty, and for the generous and manly spirit of its' [*sic*] people, a second instance should have occurred of so atrocious and dastardly an attempt."[34]

In 1843, Prince Albert came to Bristol for the launching of the *Great Britain*, and the Hall decided to present him with the freedom in a box.[35]

The Crimean War led to a petition by the Society to both Houses to proceed vigorously in the war and to compel Prussia to close the overland trade with Russia.[36] The death of the Commander in Chief, Lord Raglan, was a matter of some concern, since his body was brought back by sea to Bristol en route for Badminton. The Mayor suggested that it might be acceptable to the Beauforts if there were some public recognition, and the Master wrote to the duke offering to place the Hall at his disposal if the body was to stay a day or more in Bristol. However, the duke replied that it was the intention to proceed straight to Badminton. Claxton made the necessary arrangements for members to accompany the body as far as Fishponds, and a black-edged notice informed them that carriages would be provided and that "It is expected that each Gentleman will appear in Mourning, with White Ties, and Crape or Cloth Hat Bands."[37]

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[29] *H.B.18*, pp. 419, 421, 15 Feb. 1840; pp. 422–3, 13 March 1840; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 195, 196.

[30] *H.B.18*, p. 453, 18 June 1840; *Book of Petitions*, pp. 197–8.

[31] *H.B.19*, p. 63, 2 Dec. 1840 (16 present); *Book of Petitions*, pp. 199–200.

[32] *H.B.19*, p. 184, 23 Nov. 1841 (30 present); *Book of Petitions*, pp. 200–3.

[33] *H.B.19*, p. 239, 4 May 1842.

[34] *H.B.19*, pp. 250–2, 10 June 1842. There were similar addresses to Albert and to the Duchess of Kent (*ibid.*, pp. 252–3); *Book of Petitions*, pp. 211–13.

[35] *H.B.19*, p. 361, 1 July 1843 (13 present).

In 1861, Queen Victoria's mother, the Duchess of Kent, died, and the Society sent its condolences to the Queen in terms which Victoria might well have thought overstated the position, for the Address spoke of "one to whose Maternal fostering love and wisdom in the care and culture of your Majesty's early years this Nation is, under God, indebted for the Blessings of your Majesty's illustrious, beneficent and Happy Reign".[38]

Early in 1862, the Society sent to the Queen an Address of Condolence on the death of Prince Albert.[39] Next year, the Hall was illuminated for the marriage of the Prince of Wales, and £20 was given to a fund for a public celebration.[40]

Other Addresses of congratulation or sympathy included those sent to the Queen and the Prince of Wales when his wife gave birth to a son in 1864; to the Queen and the Prince of Wales when the latter recovered from an alarming illness in 1872; to the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh when he married the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovina in 1874; to the Queen and the Prince of Wales when he returned safely from India in 1876; to the Queen on the death of Princess Alice, Grand Duchess of Hesse Darmstadt in 1878, and to the Queen on the death of the Duke of Clarence in 1892.[41]

Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 called for yet another Loyal Address,[42] and next year £10 was given towards the cost of decorating the city when Prince Albert Victor came to unveil the statue of the Queen on College Green.[43] In 1896, Mary, Duchess of Teck, visited Bristol and the Master entertained her to luncheon in the Hall.[44]

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[36] *H.B.21*, p. 469, 12 April 1855; p. 477, 20 April 1855. It may be significant of the changing role of the Society in public affairs that the last entry in the *Book of Charters and Petitions* is just after the middle of the century.

[37] *H.B.21*, p. 497, 12 July 1855; p. 500, 13 July 1855; p. 504, 16 July 1855; p. 512, 16 and 17 July 1855.

[38] *H.B.23*, p. 121, 3 April 1861.

[39] *H.B.23*, pp. 180, 181, 11 Jan. 1862.

[40] *H.B.23*, p. 263, 20 Feb. 1863.

[41] *H.B.23*, p. 335, 14 Jan. 1864; *H.B.25*, p. 121, 25 Jan. 1872; pp. 304, 307, 23 and 30 Jan. 1874; *H.B.26*, pp. 57, 61–2, 26 May 1876; pp. 227, 229, 21 Dec. 1875; *H.B.27*, p. 419, 29 Jan. 1892.

[42] *H.B.27*, p. 204, 27 May 1887.

In 1899 when Victoria was coming to Bristol to open a convalescent home, the Society voted 100 guineas towards the celebrations and was anxious to present an Address. The Lord Mayor regretted that there would not be time as the visit was very short, but agreed to arrange for the Master to meet the Queen at the station and ride in one of the carriages. In due course, the Master reported that he had been presented to the Queen and had travelled in a carriage with the Earl of Cork and Orrery (Lord Lieutenant of Somerset) and the Earl of Cawdor (Chairman of the Great Western Railway Company).[45]

THE SOCIETY'S WATERWORKS

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Bristol had one of the worst water supplies in the country, and evidence given by Sir Henry de la Beche, Dr. L. Playfair and others at the Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Means of Improving the Health of the Population of Large Towns in 1843 underlined this fact and related it to the low expectation of life. It was estimated that some 5,000 persons, mostly in the wealthy districts, had piped water, and that some 73,000 depended on public or private wells. In some parts of the city, water was supplied by water carriers at a cost of at least 1d. a day from wells. Dr. Budd remarked that "the filthy habits of the poorer classes in Bristol are mainly attributable to the deficient supply of water".[46]

The interest of the Society in water supply must not, however, be seen as stemming primarily from a desire to meet the appalling social problems arising from inadequate and contaminated supplies in the City as a whole, but as an attempt to improve the amenities and to make a profit from supplying water to the high-class districts with which it was particularly concerned.

With the growth of Clifton in the first half of the nineteenth century, there were obviously great possibilities for those who owned a supply of water, but the Society, which had been quick to realise the value of its quarries in connection with building,[47] was curiously slow to see the importance of its springs, possibly because their exploitation would involve considerable expenditure at a time when the Society had little liquid capital. The main sources of supply in the Clifton area were the Sion Springs, owned by the Coates family, which supplied about 400 houses in 1840; the Richmond and Buckingham Springs, which supplied houses near Richmond Terrace; and Jacob's Wells, which supplied a few families by pipes owned by the Dean and Chapter of Bristol.[48]

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[43] *H.B.27*, p. 252, 20 July 1888.

[44] *H.B.28*, p. 174, 24 July 1896; pp. 195, 196, 27 Nov. 1896.

[45] *H.B.28*, p. 326, 29 Sept. 1899; p. 327, 20 Oct. 1899.

[46] Among the Society's records, in a box marked *Waterworks*, is a copy of a pamphlet dated 14 Nov. 1845 entitled "A Report setting forth a plan proposed for carrying out the chief recommendation of Her Majesty's Commission of Enquiry into the Means of Improving the Health of the Population of Large Towns." For the general question of public health, see David Large and Frances Round, *Public Health in mid-Victorian Bristol*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1974.

The Coates family was very active in developing the water supply of Clifton and claimed that the origin and rapid development of the district was very largely due to the character of the Sion Spring which had never fluctuated over 60 years since it was first discovered and which had supplied houses with piped water from 1811, before almost any other town.[49] The Society assisted the Coates family in various ways. In 1814, for example, it gave permission to lay pipes under the waste to take water to Harley Place, and in 1826 it had no objection to Mrs. Coates laying more pipes under the waste and making a reservoir on the Society's land at Clifton Hill for a rent of 10s. per annum.[50] Mrs. Coates did not make the reservoir, and in 1836 her son, Joseph Coates, applied for permission. He stated that many improvements had been made in recent years to the Sion Spring supply and that a mile of new pipes with fire plugs had recently been laid. However, the population of the northern part of Clifton had greatly increased, and if the pumps were out of action, there would be a serious fire risk. He was willing to make a tank and arch it over with turf so that its very existence would not be known. The cost would be about £1,200, and he wanted a lease of the land at a nominal rent. He attended the Hall and was told the matter would be considered.[51]

By this time, however, the Society itself was becoming interested in water supply. In March 1836, the Zoological Gardens had applied to the Hall for lease of a spring in the Old Hotwell House to supply a reservoir in the Gardens. When the Clerk investigated, he found that there was in addition to this spring another one on the Society's land with the much greater capacity of about 300 gallons an hour. The Hall set up a sub-committee "to consider the practicability and expediency of establishing works for the supply not only of the Zoological Gardens but the Parish of Clifton in General".[52] About the same time, the Society learnt that Mr. Coates might be willing to sell Sion Spring and it negotiated with him with a view to developing a supply of water for the whole of Clifton. However, Coates wanted too much for his property, and nothing came of the negotiations.[53] When in 1840 Coates asked to be allowed to build a tank on Windmill Hill, as had been agreed earlier with his mother, the committee thought it was not now advisable to let him do so.[54]

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[47] See pp. 351–2.

[48] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 280–1. When the new Waterworks Company was formed in 1846, it bought out the Sion Hill Spring for £13,500; the Buckingham Spring for £2,196; the Richmond Spring for £4,950, and the Whiteladies Spring for £400.

[49] Society's Archives: *Waterworks Box*, letter from Joseph Coates to Jeremiah Osborne, 7 June 1836.

[50] *H.B.14*, p. 311, 28 Oct. 1814; *H.B.16*, p. 129, 3 May 1826; p. 139, 5 July 1826.

[51] *Waterworks Box*, Joseph Coates to Jeremiah Osborne, 7 June 1836; *H.B.17*, pp. 400–1, 8 June 1836.

The Society's tentative investigation had been concerned only with Clifton, but in 1840 there was a proposal put forward by others which concerned the whole of Bristol. A leaflet put out by the proposed company – the Bristol and Clifton Waterworks – pointed out that Bristol was sadly behind other towns, although it had a plentiful supply of water in the neighbourhood. Subscriptions were invited by the provisional secretary, Samuel Capper.[55] A meeting, presided over by the Mayor, J. N. Franklyn, was held in March 1840, and it was proposed to form a company with a capital of £60,000 in £50 shares. The scheme failed for lack of support.[56]

A year later, on 7 April 1841, the Society once again turned its attention to a Waterworks for Clifton and asked a sub-committee to investigate.[57] It reported at length to the Standing Committee on 11 June. It had obtained the papers relating to Capper's scheme in 1840, and it had instructed John Armstrong to examine the springs in Leigh Woods, the New and the Old Hotwell, and another spring below that, and it was looking into the cost of taking enough water up to a reservoir on Windmill Hill to supply double the needs of Clifton.[58] The Waterworks Committee reported again in August. The two springs at Black Rock would produce 94,600 gallons a day. Mr. Armstrong had suggested one reservoir at the springs and another on Clifton Downs. The cost would be £10,445, with £4,505 added for contingencies, bringing the total to £15,000. The estimated net return, after deducting £600 a year for management, would provide "an ample and remunerative profit for the Outlay". The reservoir in the most elevated spot in Clifton would be of great public benefit in case of fire. The report suggested that a bill should be introduced in the present session, and with an eye to the future, that it should cover the city and county of Bristol and Westbury-on-Trym. The capital of £15,000 was to be raised on bonds. The Standing Committee approved the report.[59]

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[52] *H.B.17*, p. 377, 9 March 1836.

[53] *H.B.17*, p. 394, 11 May 1836; pp. 400, 401, 8 June 1836.

[54] *H.B.18*, p. 440, 8 May 1840.

[55] The provisional secretary, who signed the appeal, was Samuel Capper. A number of papers relating to the scheme are in the Society's archives because, when the Society had its own scheme in 1841, it obtained the papers from Mr. Gregory, the solicitor who had been concerned with it. There is a schedule of the papers sent by Gregory and a number of letters of Samuel Capper between 1839 and 1841.

[56] For Capper's report to a meeting held at the White Lion, 25 March 1840, see *Waterworks Box*; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 280.

[57] *H.B.19*, p. 97, 7 April 1841.

[58] *H.B.19*, p. 116, 11 June 1841.

In September 1841 the Standing Committee recommended that Brunel should be employed as engineer and in November set up a special Waterworks Committee under the Master. What eventually emerged was a bill for the better supplying with water of the City and County of Bristol.[60] In support of its bill, the Society argued that the principal part of Clifton was now united by buildings with Bristol and had a population of 18,000. Most of the water came from the Sion Spring and the Richmond Spring and was raised by steam engine and distributed for a charge of 5 per cent to 6 per cent on the rental. Distribution and supply were in the hands of private individuals and were very inefficient. The proposed scheme would supply a long-felt want.[61]

Not surprisingly, the bill met with opposition from the proprietors of other springs and from some whose property would be affected, including John Combe of the Richmond Spring, the Coates of the Sion Spring and Sir John Smythe of Ashton Court.[62] An attempt was made to reach agreement with Mr. Coates, but his terms were regarded as unreasonable. The Society was advised by its parliamentary agent in London that if it omitted from the bill the clauses empowering it to take the Waterworks belonging to Coates and others by compulsion, the objectors would have no case for being heard by Parliament.[63] In the end the Hall decided that it could achieve its objectives in Clifton (with which it was really concerned) without a bill, and it waited for Brunel's report on the sources of supply and the cost of a waterworks.[64]

In June 1842, the Society received a deputation from the churchwardens and some of the inhabitants of Clifton pointing out the need for a water supply in case of fire, for watering the streets and for supplying the houses. The deputation was informed of the Society's plans and of its intention to proceed without an Act of Parliament, and the Hall was assured that it would receive every assistance.[65]

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[59] *H.B.19*, pp. 131 ff., 13 Aug. 1841.

[60] *H.B.19*, pp. 153–4, 20 Sept. 1841.

[61] *Waterworks Box*: Draft on behalf of the Merchant Venturers and others against the bill brought in by the Bristol Waterworks Company in 1846, pp. 5, 6. The brief is concerned with 1846 but by way of introduction refers to the earlier scheme.

[62] *Waterworks Box*: Petitions against the bill from John Combe, Joseph Baker, Sir John Smythe, Richard Ash and Joseph Coates, 24 Feb. 1842.

[63] *Ibid.*, letter from Dyson and Parker, 25 Parliament Street, 24 Jan. 1842.

[64] *H.B.19*, p. 228, 18 March 1842.

In September 1842, the Clerk was busy making enquiries from a parliamentary agent about whether in any Act which the Society might seek to obtain it could insert a clause giving power to Clifton or any other parish to levy a rate for watering the streets. Obviously, if the parish had such powers, the Society would be able to make a contract with it to supply the water. However, the reply was discouraging. Such powers were usually given to Commissioners for Improvements, and there was no precedent for giving distinct powers for different objects to two sets of persons in the same bill.[66]

At the end of September 1842, Brunel submitted his lengthy report. The estimated cost of engines, reservoir and work for supplying Clifton and parts of Hotwells and College Green from springs at the Black Rock, with a reservoir on Clifton Down, was £12,000. The annual running cost on the base of supplying 2,500 houses would be £1,364. To supply the new district being built north of Clifton would cost an additional sum of between £5,000 and £8,000. The report was considered at a General Hall on 5 October 1842. Only 14 members were present. It was proposed that the Waterworks Committee should be asked to consider whether the Society had sufficient property available for sale to cover the cost, but an amendment that it was not expedient at present to enter into so large an outlay was put to the meeting and was carried.[67]

The matter did not rest there, presumably because some members were enthusiastic about the scheme. In December 1842, the Waterworks Committee reported to the Standing Committee that the Society had no property to sell at present except Honeypen Hill Quarry, and that if the scheme were adopted, the money would have to be raised on bonds.[68] In January 1843, the Standing Committee was asked to prepare a Report, and on 2 June it received a lengthy Report from its Waterworks Committee. This surveyed the whole business since January 1841. It stated that in 1842 the proprietors of Richmond Hill and Sion Hill Springs had threatened opposition and that although it had originally been intended to get an Act of Parliament, "especially with reference to their ultimate object – the supply of Bristol", it had been decided to proceed merely with the plans for Clifton. It was impossible to be sure of the revenue, but enquiries at London, Leeds, Birmingham, Shrewsbury, Bath, Gloucester, Exeter and Reading showing that when waterworks were established, there was almost universal use of them. Wells were irregular in supply and expensive to maintain. In most towns, an extra charge was made and gladly paid for water closets. The present supply in Clifton depended on the Sion and Richmond Springs and Jacob's Wells and on private wells, which were unsatisfactory. Many people used their neighbours' wells, and the supply was often deficient. The wells on the river bank were affected by the tides, and St. Augustine's often had to get its water by cart. The best-supplied parts of Clifton depended on the Sion and Richmond Springs, but the charge was from 5 per cent to 7 per cent on the rental. It was impossible to get water higher than the ground floor or to supply water closets. A reservoir would overcome this difficulty. It was impossible to find out the profits of Water Companies elsewhere, because they did not publish accounts and refused to give information "for fear of the disclosure leading to competition or claims for a reduction of charges". Nevertheless some evidence was produced to show that the profits in Bristol were considerable.

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[65] *H.B.19*, p. 248, 10 June 1842. The deputation consisted of John Fowler and Robert Gay Barrow (the churchwardens), Mr. Allen, Mr. Charles Vaughan, Mr. Samuel Worrall, Mr. Hauteville and Mr. Middleton. The churchwardens were both Merchant Venturers.

[66] *Waterworks Box*: Hall and Parker to Osborne and Ward, 19 Sept. 1842.

[67] *H.B.19*, pp. 285, 288 ff., 5 Oct. 1842.

[68] *H.B.19*, p. 314, 9 Dec. 1842.

The Waterworks Committee was clearly enthusiastic for its scheme, but the Standing Committee resolved that the present state of the Society's funds made it inexpedient to proceed further, and this decision was confirmed at a General Hall, at which 24 members were present, on 2 June 1843.[69]

The proposal remained in abeyance for nearly a year. Then, on 29 May 1844, the Standing Committee received another Memorial from the inhabitants of Clifton asking it to take action, and a subcommittee consisting of the Master, the Wardens, Mr. Bush, Mr. Pinney, Mr. Hellicar and the Treasurer was set up to consider the desirability of establishing a Waterworks for Clifton.[70]

In September 1844, the new Waterworks Committee produced a long and enthusiastic Report. It agreed that the existing supply was inadequate and that there was a strong desire for something more extensive. The district to be supplied in the first place was a great part of Clifton containing "All the best Houses and much valuable land now being laid out for building, including many fields belonging to the Society". Under Brunel's direction, Mr. Hammond had prepared plans for supplying 630 houses, but with an engine capable of providing three times as much as their needs, at a cost of £7,225, and an annual expenditure of £882. Running costs would be £1,202 a year, including interest charges on the money which would have to be borrowed. If the water rate were the same as that charged by existing Waterworks, the income for 650 houses would be twice that amount, bringing in a profit of £1,200 a year. The proposed scheme would provide water for dealing with fires and for watering the roads and would carry the water to upper stories and to water closets. Many substantial householders were willing to transfer from the existing supplies, and profits were likely to be very large. Whether the Society should operate on its own or in cooperation with others would depend on the state of its funds. The Treasurer estimated the present value of the Society's property at £60,000, and £8,000 to £10,000 could be raised on bonds. Only a small staff would be required. Since the Society was Lord of the Manor of Clifton, it was very desirable to carry out a scheme materially affecting property values and the comfort and convenience of the inhabitants. It could make sure of customers by inserting suitable clauses when it renewed leases or disposed of land for building.

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[69] See *H.B.19*, pp. 349 ff., 2 June 1843, for the Report of the Waterworks Committee and the decision of the Standing Committee; p. 357, for its confirmation by the Hall.

[70] *H.B.19*, p. 448, 29 May 1844. The Memorial does not seem to have survived, and we do not know how many inhabitants of Clifton signed it.

Up to this point, the Waterworks Committee had been concerned with arguing that the scheme would be very profitable, but then, possibly with an eye to the Society's public image, it pointed out that the profits could be applied to many public purposes and that it was not simply in the position of an individual making money. It was the only public body in the City with funds for public utility. When it surrendered the wharfage lease in 19 years' time, it might be embarrassed, and there was no other source from which it could get an income to meet so serious a loss. It was advisable to act now owing to the state of the money market and the low price of materials and labour.[71]

Further investigations were carried out by Hammond on the Society's springs, and favourable reports were received.[72] The Hall approved the Waterworks Committee's report and Brunel's plan on 14 March 1845, and ironfounders were invited to tender for 300 tons of cast iron pipes.[73] The Society was thus committed to a waterworks scheme for Clifton.

Unfortunately for the Society, its plan was now threatened by the formation of a Joint Stock Company which proposed to supply the whole of Bristol. On 26 April 1845, the Standing Committee received a letter from Mr. Christopher Shapland and Mr. Hulton asking the Society to concur with them and their friends to make a Waterworks for the whole of the city. Mr. Hulton said that a friend of his, "a large capitalist in London", would put up the capital either with the

[71] *H.B.20*, pp. 24 ff., 13 Sept. 1844.

[72] *H.B.20*, p. 42, 25 Oct. 1844; p. 70, 22 Nov. 1844; p. 80, 13 Dec. 1844.

[73] *H.B.20*, p. 105, 14 March 1845; *Waterworks Box*, copies of notices in the *Bristol Gazette and Public Advertiser* inviting tenders by 3 May.

Society as a partner or in a Joint Stock Company. He pointed out that the Society's plan was threatened by another company which was being formed in opposition to it. The Standing Committee decided to reject the offer of help from Shapland and Hulton and to inform the rival company now being formed that it intended "to extend their supply to the City".[74]

The appearance of this rival company stampeded the Society into going far beyond what it had originally intended. Its main purpose was to supply the Clifton area, although it had also wanted to keep open the option to go further if supplies were adequate. It must have feared that the rival scheme would be more attractive to parliament, and so it now claimed that it could itself supply the whole of Bristol. On 29 April 1845, it wrote to Mr. Haberfield, Deputy Chairman of the rival Waterworks Company, saying that perhaps he had not realised that the Society intended to do this. He replied on 30 April saying that the promoters of his scheme were certainly not aware of such a proposal. They had long been thinking of establishing a waterworks and they thought it could best be done by a company specifically incorporated for that purpose. They intended to apply for an Act of Parliament.[75]

The Society pressed on with its plans. In June 1845, the Standing Committee approved a proposal to raise £3,000 on bonds, and in July it reported that considerable progress had been made with the work at Hotwells.[76] In January 1846, the Waterworks Committee reported that it had started the procedure to obtain its own Act of Parliament. It pointed out that the Commission on the Health of Large Towns had stated that competition between rival companies should be avoided as far as possible and that it was desirable that water supply should be coupled with draining and cleansing. The Joint Stock Company, unlike the Society, was concerned only with water supply.[77] The committee understood that the principal landowners through whose land flowed the streams which the rival company hoped to use were opposed to the bill and suggested that their opposition should be organised. As far as the Society's own scheme was concerned, most of the pipes had been laid; the reservoir, the engine house and other work was in hand and should be completed by early spring. The Standing Committee accepted the report and ordered that steps should be taken to promote the Society's bill and oppose that of its rival.[78]

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[74] *H.B.20*, p. 109, 26 April 1845.

[75] *Waterworks Box*: Draft brief on behalf of the Society and others, 1846, pp. 7, 8.

[76] *H.B.20*, p. 119, 24 June 1845; p. 134, 18 July 1845.

[77] For the Society's interest in sewers, see for example, *H.B.15*, p. 94, 7 June 1820; *H.B.16*, p. 10, 7 Jan. 1825; *H.B.17*, p. 118, 14 Sept. 1832; p. 140, 16 June 1833; p. 232, 4 June 1834; p. 301, 13 May 1835; p. 308, 26 May 1835; p. 314, 17 June 1835; *H.B.18*, p. 5, 9 Dec. 1836; *H.B.19*, p. 16, 14 Aug. 1840; p. 257, 8 July 1842.

In the draft bill prepared for Parliament, the Society did not in fact seek powers to supply the whole of Bristol. It limited its area to the parish of Clifton; St. George's, Brandon Hill; St. Augustine the Less; St. Michael's; the in-parish and the out-parish of St. James; and such part of the parish of St. Paul as formed part of the street called Stokes Croft and lay on the west side of the street and of the turnpike road from Stokes Croft to Gloucester. It also included that part of the parish of Westbury-on-Trym which was in the City of Bristol. It undertook to supply all houses within 12 yards of any pipe, and it laid down a scale of charges based on rateable value. Tacked on to the bill was a section relating to sewers which stated that there were few sewers in Clifton and Westbury. The inhabitants of these parishes were to elect Commissioners of Sewers within three months who were to treat with the Society and others to make sewers and who were to have power to levy a rate.[79]

Since the Society had thus abandoned the claim that it intended to supply the whole of Bristol, it had to give some explanation. It maintained that when the Joint Stock Company had obtained the necessary subscription, the Hall had abandoned its original intention and confined its undertakings to such part of the city as was immediately and naturally the concern of the Society.[80] Since it is improbable that the Society had ever seriously intended to supply the whole of Bristol, this was a little ingenuous. What the Hall was now hoping to obtain was the right to supply the wealthier parts of the area.

On 1 April 1846, the Waterworks Committee reported that it had brought in the bill and was taking joint action with those who opposed the Bristol Waterworks Company. A petition against the Society's bill had been presented by Mr. Coates and others, and this, it claimed, had been "got up" by the Bristol Waterworks Company. The rival bill had passed its first stages and had been committed before the Society's bill had passed Standing Orders, but the Waterworks Committee, with the help of friends in parliament, had arranged that the Parliamentary Committee would not report until it had examined both bills. The Parliamentary Committee had tried to get both parties to agree to a division of the area, but the Bristol Waterworks Company would not accept this. Instead, it had offered to repay the Society the money it had spent and it invited it to come in as a partner. This offer had been refused. The Society's bill had received its first and second readings and would come before the Parliamentary Committee on 23 April. The Waterworks Committee, optimistic as ever, had little doubt that the Society would get at least Clifton and part of the neighbouring parishes.

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[78] *H.B.20*, p. 189, 9 Jan. 1846.

[79] *Waterworks Box*: "A Bill for better supplying with Water and improving the Sewerage of certain parts of the City and County of Bristol", ordered to be brought in by William Miles and P. W. S. Miles.

[80] *Waterworks Box*: Draft brief on behalf of the Society and others, 1846; see also *Sub-committee Book 1842–1846* for folder containing documents relating to the waterworks. This contains a draft letter of 24 March 1846 from Robert Osborne to Charles Bragge, secretary to the Bristol Waterworks Company, regretting that the Bristol Waterworks Company considered the proposal to divide the City inadmissible.

In the discussion of this Report, the Master remarked that counsel for the Bristol Waterworks Company had intimated that if the City were to be divided, his Company would probably withdraw. The Society must therefore consider whether it would undertake the whole task if asked to do so. The Standing Committee euphoristically recommended that the Society should agree to do this.[81] This recommendation was not confirmed at the General Hall held on the same day at which 17 members were present, and the matter was referred to a Special Hall on 8 April 1846. At the Special Hall, again attended by only 17 members, the Society stated that it was willing to undertake the work of supplying the whole of Bristol with water.[82] In view of the immense cost and risk and the limited resources of the Society, this could easily have meant financial suicide.

At a meeting of the Standing Committee on 1 May 1846, the Treasurer read out two notices requiring the Society to produce to the House of Commons all its Charters, proof that it held the manor of Clifton, and a rental showing that it had a surplus income of £2,500 a year, as it had claimed. This was required by the representatives of Joseph Coates and others who denied that the Society held the manor or any springs in Clifton. The whole of the Standing Committee was asked to go to London to assist in the battle.[83]

Among the witnesses who gave evidence before the Parliamentary Committee was the Treasurer, William Claxton, who outlined the history and achievements of the Society and stated that its income was about £5,000 a year, less charges, of about £1,000 a year. He gave his version of the history of the waterworks proposals and claimed that "the interest of the Society in their property in Clifton . . . is so great as to make it of far more importance to them to consider that improvement than to regard the amount of profit which they may be enabled to derive". The Society could carry out the

[81] *H.B.20*, pp. 207, 208, 211, 1 April 1846.

[82] *H.B.20*, p. 209, 1 April 1846; p. 214, 8 April 1846.

[83] *H.B.20*, pp. 222 ff., 1 May 1846; *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 116, 4 May 1846, where Claxton comments on the opposition to the Society from the whole of Bristol, including Clifton. According to Claxton, the Master, Edward Drew, could not or would not go to London.

work cheaply, and the public would get the benefit of their profits.[84]

There were thus two bills before the Parliamentary Committee, and extremely bitter feeling was aroused by the determination of the Society to proceed with its limited scheme. The *Bristol Gazette* on 2 April 1846 contrasted the two bills. The Bristol Waterworks Company would provide 4 million gallons a day; the Society's springs were insufficient. The Society's charges would be higher, its engineer, Brunel, was a man who had never constructed a waterworks in his life, whereas the Bristol Waterworks Company was employing an experienced engineer. The article went on to say "Finally, the *Society of Merchants* is a small, close, irresponsible Corporation, endued, as its past conduct abundantly testifies, with the grasping and selfish policy which invariably distinguishes such bodies: its finances are crippled, its energies, if for some scores of years it has had any, paralysed – its whole constitution and government inimicable to the present state of Society." The paper claimed that Bristolians were witnessing "the not very creditable spectacle of a circumscribed knot of merchants, backed by one of our own members in Parliament, seeking, for their own aggrandizement and revenue, to break up one of the most valuable and important measures ever brought forward in Bristol. . . . The atrocious Wharfage Lease . . . will ere long revert to the city, and they want something to supply the defalcation. . . ."

The leading article in the *Bristol Mercury* for 4 April was headed "The Merchant Venturers v. The Inhabitants of Bristol and Clifton". It stated that a public meeting of the inhabitants of Bristol and Clifton would shortly be held "for the purpose of entering an indignant protest against the proceedings of the Merchant Venturers (the Merchant Vandals, rather, as we once before, and may again call them . . ."). Not only were they delaying the Bristol Waterworks Company but they were desecrating Clifton Downs by their reservoir. It went on "In addition to their other misdemeanours, one of the loveliest spots in England is actually being pulled to pieces by these lawless vandals, in prosecution of their small scheme for putting a little money into their own pockets by constituting themselves Water-merchants to the wealthy part of the community." Clifton Down was covered with stones and rubbish; Durdham Down had been encroached upon, trees were being torn down and roads blasted on the banks of the river "in the narrowest spirit of mere money-making". It was time to institute some kind of enquiry into the powers possessed by this anomalous Corporation.

On 8 April 1846, the *Bristol Gazette*'s leading article referred to the efforts of the Bristol Waterworks Company to provide the whole of the city with good water from the Mendips at fair rates. The scheme had general support and a firm prospect of success, but now the selfish obstinacy of about a score of individuals had put the whole plan in peril. The Society of Merchants was doing its utmost to prevent the citizens of Bristol receiving an adequate supply, their chief necessary of life. The Society had neither the power nor even the inclination to do this good to Bristol, and "for the mere sordid object of increasing their own revenue they are doing all they can to frustrate others". The prospect of Bristol being supplied at all was put in jeopardy by "the dog-in-manger conduct of a little body of men, respectable no doubt as individuals, but in their public capacity remarkable only for intense devotion to their own interests and selfish disregard of all other considerations".

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[84] *Waterworks Box*: Proofs of Evidence of Witnesses, 1846. These include other witnesses besides Claxton.

A letter signed "Investigator" which appeared in the *Bristol Gazette* on 16 April commented "I leave to my fellow-citizens to reflect whether the Society of Merchant Venturers is of the least use to the city; and, indeed, when I call to mind the old bad job, the Wharfage Lease, and their mischievous interference with our city affairs, I believe that the very best thing to be done would be for the Town Council to apply for an Act of Parliament to abolish the Society altogether, and transfer their property to the city with the management of Pilots, and any other duty now performed by the Merchants. . . ."

At a large meeting called by the Mayor, John Kerle Haberfield, at Coopers' Hall on 20 April 1846, there was a long discussion on the two schemes and on another put forward by the Town Improvement Company, and it was decided, with only 7 dissentients, to petition Parliament in support of the Waterworks Company and against the Merchant Venturers.[85]

The Parliamentary Committee decided in favour of the Bristol Waterworks Company and against the Society's bill. On 12 June 1846, the Hall received a Report from its Waterworks Committee which stated that the bill had been rejected but that the Waterworks Company had been required to repay the Society's expenses in laying pipes and carrying out other work. There was a note of bitterness in the Report. It was claimed that the Society's opponents had sought their objectives "by propagation of every description of abuse against the Society as a Body, by misrepresentation of their motives and intentions without even the shadow of truth upon which to found them and by attacks upon the Title to their Property". In spite of the full explanation given to the Town Council about the Society's desire to cooperate in obtaining the cheapest possible supply and about the application of the profits for the benefit of the City, "The Town Council with whom such reason ought to have been conclusive in favour of the Society threw every obstacle in their way and, whilst proposing to be neuter and to watch the public Interests alone, in effect supported the other Measure to the manifest disregard of the Interests of the City generally and to the direct and positive injury of the Inhabitants affected by the Society's Bill." What was even worse, the bill was "almost universally objected to by the Inhabitants of Clifton the very parties at whose instigation and for whose convenience and advantage it was undertaken". Forgetting, apparently that the matter had been decided in parliament, the Waterworks Committee thought it would not be expedient "to persevere in the attempt to benefit those who under any circumstances could be so induced to make so ungrateful a return".

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[85] A folder in *Sub-Committee Book 1842–1846* containing a number of press cuttings and other material relating to the case.

The Waterworks Committee then gave an account of negotiations concerning compensation with the new Bristol Waterworks Company. Brunel valued the Society's works at £15,000, but the Waterworks Company offered £14,000 and refused to buy the Society's springs and the ground on which the engine house stood. After much negotiation, the figure of £18,000 had been agreed, but the Society retained the Engine House and reservoir on Clifton Down. Mr. Henry Berkeley, one of the City's M.P.s, wanted the Society to fill in the reservoir, but the Waterworks Committee had agreed only to ensure that it should not be an annoyance or a desight. The Committee remarked that Mr. Berkeley had throughout shown the most determined opposition and hostility to the Society but that Mr. P. W. S. Miles, the other M.P., and his brother had supported it.[86] The Treasurer, William Claxton, who had been heavily involved in the scheme, commented acidly "Thus my hopes are blighted of the Water Works enabling the Society to be more extensively useful, but the result is yet to be seen. I expect that the Inhabitants of Clifton will repent in Sackcloth and ashes of the opposition they made to our Bill and that they will never get supplied by the Joint Stock Co. nous verrons." "The Society", he wrote "have been thwarted in a great object which they intended for the City's good. The City turned against them, and if I do not mistake, the City will find they have been wrong in upholding a Joint Stock Concern against so honourable a public Body."[87]

There was a certain amount of tidying up to do. In 1848, estimates of £700 and £750 were obtained for filling in the reservoir of Observatory Hill, Clifton, but Claxton himself undertook the work for £250.[88] The curious engine house was removed in 1864 when the railway to Avonmouth was constructed.[89]

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[86] *H.B.20*, pp. 229, 232 ff., 12 June 1846, Report of Waterworks Committee which was accepted by the Hall. Miles was a Tory who later became a Merchant Venturer; Berkeley was a Liberal.

[87] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 117, 4 May 1846; p. 121, 10 Nov. 1846.

This was the second major shock which the Society had experienced in the eighteen-forties.[90] At this time, it had succeeded in arousing tremendous hostility from the inhabitants of Bristol and even from Clifton. It professed to be concerned only with the public good, but its motives were in fact mixed, and it is hardly surprising that the city did not interpret them in the same way as did the Society. If there had not been a proposal by the Bristol Waterworks Company to supply the whole of Bristol, there would have been much to be said in favour of the Society's original limited scheme. What is difficult to understand is how the Society in the course of the battle could be prepared to commit itself to supplying water to the whole of Bristol. If it had been allowed to do so, the result would almost certainly have been bankruptcy.

THE SOCIETY AND THE DOWNS

As lord of the manor of Clifton, the Society continued in the nineteenth century to keep a watchful eye on its rights over Clifton Down and that part of Durdham Down which lay in the manor of Clifton.[91] These rights were of value, particularly in relation to quarrying,[92] and it was fortunate that in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Society was fully occupied in building development elsewhere and that pressure for building on the Downs themselves was limited. Moreover, the Society wanted to retain an open space which offered a considerable amenity to the inhabitants of Clifton. For these reasons, there was little temptation for it to consider the possibility of enclosure.

From time to time, the Society took action to preserve the amenities and to prevent infringements of its rights. Thus, in 1811 it dealt with complaints that dung and ashes were being deposited on Clifton waste; in 1815 it tried to deal with people who allowed asses to graze there, and in 1822 it proceeded against a man who had hauled stones illegally from one of the quarries and against those who beat carpets on the downs. In the same year, the Clerk was told to put an immediate stop to the depredation being committed on the Roman Camp, "it being the unanimous wish of the Committee to preserve as far as possible that very interesting Antiquity".[93]

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[88] *Ibid.*, p. 133, May 1848.

[89] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 281, note. For other references to the winding up of the scheme, see *H.B.20*, p. 276, 11 Dec. 1846; pp. 292 ff., 12 Feb. 1847; p. 390, 14 July 1848; p. 428, 8 Dec. 1848.

[90] For the other, see pp. 365–70.

[91] For a valuable pamphlet on the subject, see Elizabeth Ralph, *The Downs*, Bristol Corporation, 1961.

[92] See pp. 351–2.

Encouragement and help were given to the inhabitants of Clifton who sought to improve the amenities. Thus, in 1812 permission was granted to a number of gentlemen to replace with beeches some dead fir trees on Clifton Down; in 1816 20 guineas was sent to Mrs. Ames and Miss Morgan towards the cost of improvements; and in 1826 sympathetic consideration was given to the request of the Clifton Committee for the Preservation of the Downs to use the old mill as a wheelbarrow and tool shed and to provide shelter for the beadle at night.[94]

Unseemly activities were discouraged. When in 1826 Mr. Courtney proposed to make another descent across the river from St. Vincent's Rocks, he was told he would not be allowed to erect his apparatus on the Society's property, "Such Exhibitions besides being attended with great danger to this Individual (who upon the two former occasions it appears was in a state of Intoxication) having a powerful tendency to demoralize the lower Orders by promoting habits of Idleness and Intemperance."[95] In 1845, Mr. Bellamy's application for permission to erect a gallery on Clifton Down to exhibit cork models was turned down.[96]

On the other hand, there was no objection to a proposal of William West in 1828 to build an Observatory, as the plans showed that it would be "an Object of Beauty and that it may be useful for the purpose of signals to shipping". He was given a 7 year lease at 5s. a year.[97] In 1834, he wanted to make certain additions to house astronomical implements, and as this was for the public benefit and in the interest of science, he was given a 21 year lease at 10s. a year.[98] In the course of excavating for his building, West found that it would be possible to make a lateral shaft into the Giants' Cave, and the Society approved the work as geologically very interesting and a source of gratification to visitors.[99] In 1837, the work was nearly finished at a cost of over £1,300, and West was given a donation from the Society.[100] In 1854, he was allowed to make further alterations,[101] but when in 1866 he proposed to establish a bazaar, he was told that this was contrary to his agreement.[102]

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[93] *H.B.14*, p. 150, 6 March 1811; p. 355, 18 July 1815; *H.B.15*, p. 244, 9 July 1822; p. 290, 3 Dec. 1822. See also *Letter Book III, 1816–1826*, p. 27, 21 Oct. 1817; p. 31, 11 Nov. 1817; p. 210, 12 July 1822. There are numerous other references.

[94] *H.B.14*, p. 223, 14 Nov. 1812; p. 224, 30 Dec. 1812; Society's *Letters*, bdle. 41, Mrs. Jeremiah Ames and Miss Morgan to J. Osborne, 16 April 1816; *H.B.16*, p. 133, 28 June 1826. See also *H.B.15*, p. 302, 4 March 1823; p. 303, 14 March 1823.

[95] *H.B.16*, pp. 134, 135, 28 June 1826.

[96] *H.B.20*, p. 113, 9 May 1845.

[97] *H.B.16*, p. 273, 2 April 1828. For an account of West's activities, see Elizabeth Ralph, *The Downs*, 1961.

[98] *H.B.17*, p. 282, 17 Dec. 1834. When Mr. Goldney and Mr. Henry Bush expressed the fears of the inhabitants of Clifton that the enlarged building might be used for other purposes, they were told that this was forbidden by covenants in the lease (*H.B.17*, p. 300, 13 May 1835).

[99] *H.B.17*, p. 334, 16 Sept. 1835.

Throughout the period, there continued to be many threats to the Downs. In 1838, it was reported that great destruction had been caused at the last Festival at the Zoological Gardens by disorderly persons setting fire to the gorse and furze, and as another Festival was about to be held, handbills were printed offering a reward of £5 for information leading to successful prosecution.[103] The officers of the Zoological Gardens had to be warned from time to time against depositing refuse,[104] and there were continual problems about illegal cutting of turf, destruction of trees, straying donkeys and mischievous boys.[105] In 1845, for example, "several boys who had been detected cutting the shrubs on the Down attended by their parents were brought before the Committee and admonished".[106]

The Society continued to encourage voluntary efforts to preserve the Downs. In 1840, it gave £20 to assist the work of a number of gentlemen who had spent a great deal on improvements in the last fifteen years,[107] but two years later there was a misunderstanding about the cutting down of a tree, and Henry Bush, who had been Treasurer of the Committee for public improvements in Clifton for twenty years, told the Hall that he regretted the Society "felt a distrust in the management" and announced that the committee had resigned. The Society asked it to reconsider, and it agreed to carry on.[108] Next year, the Hall's sub-committee for the Improvement of Clifton Down met some of the inhabitants of Clifton who had raised a subscription to improve the footpaths leading to the Observatory and made arrangements with them for the footpaths, for the planting of trees and for the making of a pound for stray donkeys.[109] Some years later, the Society cooperated with Mr. Gore

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[100] *H.B.18*, p. 102, 12 Sept. 1837.

[101] *H.B.21*, p. 416, 13 Oct. 1854.

[102] *H.B.24*, p. 81, 3 May 1866. In 1877, he received £10 to help repair damage done by a gale (*H.B.26*, p. 146, 26 Oct. 1877). The lease was reviewed in 1881 at £6 a year (*H.B.26*, 21 Jan. 1881) and in 1882 permission was given to erect an "anemometer" (*H.B.26*, p. 428, 28 July 1882).

[103] *H.B.18*, p. 193, 13 June 1838.

[104] *H.B.18*, p. 318, 12 April 1839; pp. 325, 326, 10 May 1839; p. 404, 13 Dec. 1839; *H.B.19*, p. 215, 15 Feb. 1842; p. 339, 16 March 1843.

[105] See, for example, *H.B.19*, p. 213, 11 Feb. 1842; p. 215, 15 Feb. 1842; p. 343, 28 April 1843; p. 369, 14 July 1843; *H.B.20*, p. 190, 9 Jan. 1846; p. 194, 28 Jan. 1846; *H.B.21*, p. 149, 20 June 1857.

[106] *H.B.20*, p. 85, 10 Jan. 1845.

[107] *H.B.18*, p. 432, 10 April 1840.

[108] *H.B.19*, p. 223, 11 March 1842; p. 232, 6 April 1842.

[109] *H.B.19*, p. 377, 13 Oct. 1843; *Sub-committee Book 1842–1846*, p. 9, 28 Nov. 1843.

Langton and others who wanted to put seats on the Downs,[110] and in 1854 it gave its support to the Association for the Improvement of Durdham Down which wished to place seats, plant trees and fill up "inequalities" on the Downs.[111]

As developers began to see the possibilities, the threat to the Downs increased. In 1844, the Society's Clifton Down Committee expressed concern about a road being made by Messrs. Cornish and Danger to facilitate the letting of land on the Downs for building. It feared that the buildings would be "a great desight to the Down".[112] At a meeting of the City Council on 12 February 1850, Mr. Visger pointed out the continual encroachments which had been made and expressed the fear that Clifton Down would eventually be enclosed.[113] The Council opposed a suggestion that it should purchase the Downs, but decided to draw the attention of the Board of Health to the value of these open spaces.[114] The threat grew greater in the fifties. The lords of the manor of Henbury did in fact sell part of Durdham Down to the parish of St. John for building a school,[115] and William Baker, who was developing Sneyd Park, made a very objectionable roadway across Durdham Down for hauling stones. He was told to stop. If he did not, the Treasurer would put in posts or dig a trench.[116] The Local Board of Health waited on the Society in 1855 to try to get it to cooperate with the City in preventing encroachments, but the Society recorded that the meeting with the Council resulted only in "desultory conversation" and that no definite plan was made.[117] Nevertheless, on 18 December

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[110] *H.B.21*, p. 10, 26 June 1849.

[111] *H.B.21*, p. 434, 22 Nov. 1854. Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 310, refers to the Clifton Improvement Association formed in 1849 which, he alleged, met with little support and some opposition from owners of quarries and clay pits and which was dissolved in 1855. There were certainly other committees and groups besides the one he mentions. For other illustrations of the Society's co-operation, see *H.B.21*, p. 489, 8 June 1855; p. 526, 28 Sept. 1855; *H.B.22*, p. 29, 8 Feb. 1856.

[112] *H.B.20*, p. 71, 22 Nov. 1844.

[113] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 317. Elizabeth Ralph, *The Downs*, 1961, quotes a solicitor who said that commonable rights were being extinguished from non-use and who thought that only about a dozen such rights survived in Henbury and three or four in Clifton. This would obviously make enclosure much easier. Part of Durdham Down had been enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1809, so there was a precedent.

[114] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 317.

[115] *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 318.

[116] *H.B.21*, p. 458, 9 March 1855. In 1856, William Baker tried hard to get the Society to agree to the making of a road from Sneyd Park to Gallow's Acre Lane, arguing "my interest in preserving the Downs is the same as the Society's". If there were no road, the inhabitants of Sneyd Park would make a great many short cuts across the Downs. The Society, however, "wholly and entirely declined" (*H.B.22*, pp. 39, 42–4, 14 March 1856).

[117] *H.B.22*, p. 12, 14 Dec. 1855.

1855, the Standing Committee set up a sub-committee to improve and preserve the Downs for the purposes of public health and recreation and to confer with the Local Board of Health.[118]

As has already been seen, the Society was criticised for desecrating the Downs at the time of the Waterworks scheme,[119] and suspicion that its intentions might not be strictly honourable evidently continued. Early in 1856, the Society found it necessary to make its position clear in a resolution which it forwarded to the Town Council which said "it having been reported that the Society of Merchant Venturers intended to inclose the Clifton Downs, this Hall most emphatically declares that such an intention to inclose or dispose of their interests in this property has never directly or indirectly existed and this Hall will continue to use their best exertions to maintain the free and uninterrupted use of these beautiful Downs for the accommodation of the Public and at the same time prevent the pasture on the Downs being injured and disfigured by trespassers with Carts and Waggons".[120]

A little later in the year, the Society's Downs Encroachment Committee conferred with the lords of the manor of Henbury and suggested setting up an iron railing at the cost of £250 to prevent "the present disgraceful Trespasses by Carts and Waggons whereby the beauty of the Downs is so much impaired and the pasturage so greatly injured". The Clerk, however, thought that this might raise legal difficulties and that it would be better to bring actions against offenders.[121]

In June 1856, the City informed the Hall that it had considered the Society's resolution concerning enclosure and had set up its own Committee on Encroachment on the Downs which would confer with the Society. Next year, the Corporation took steps to become more closely involved by purchasing for £450 property on Durdham Down which gave it rights as a commoner and consequently the right to resist any proposal for enclosure.[122]

In the following years, the Society continued to play its part in preserving the Downs. In 1857, for example, it refused to allow building materials to be dumped near Christchurch when the church tower was being built and it was prepared to contribute towards the cost of putting up iron hurdles to preserve this part of the Downs.[123] It kept a watchful eye on the activities of the Turnpike Commissioners and the Local Board of Health, both of which had statutory powers to quarry on the Downs and take sand and gravel for making roads,[124] and in 1859 it instructed the Treasurer to fence the edge of the Down at Observatory Hill and instructed the Clerk to investigate enclosure on Durdham Down.[125]

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[118] *H.B.22*, p. 16, 18 Dec. 1855.

[119] See p. 423.

[120] *H.B.22*, p. 36, 16 Feb. 1856.

[121] *H.B.22*, p. 53, 9 May 1856; pp. 61, 66, 67, 31 May 1856.

[122] *H.B.22*, p. 69, 13 June 1856; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 318; Elizabeth Ralph, *The Downs*.

[123] *H.B.22*, p. 192, 20 Oct. 1857; pp. 206, 207, 7 Dec. 1857.

Great public concern was aroused in 1859 when Samuel Worrall enclosed two pieces of common land at the top of Pembroke Road which had popularly been considered to be part of Clifton Down. The City's Committee on Encroachment drew the Society's attention to the matter and emphasised how important it was to stop enclosure. The Society's Clerk investigated the agreement made in 1788 with Samuel Worrall, its former Clerk, and came to the conclusion that it was not legally possible to stop enclosure.[126]

The Society had no desire to enclose its part of the Downs, and even if it had wished to do so, it would not have wanted to incur the immense unpopularity likely to result, but the position with regard to the manor of Henbury, owned by Sir J. Greville Smythe and the trustees of Mrs. Colston, was much less certain, and on 9 November 1859 the City Council passed a resolution that the City's Downs Encroachment Committee should negotiate with the Merchant Venturers and the lords of the manor of Henbury to obtain an Act of Parliament securing for the citizens of Bristol free enjoyment of Clifton and Durdham Down.[127] The Society would not sell its rights, but it agreed to cooperate in any well-regulated scheme for preservation.[128] As a result of the negotiations, the lords of the manor of Henbury agreed to sell the city their rights over Durdham Down for £15,000. The area involved was 212 acres.[129] The Society remained the owner of its 230 acres of Clifton and Durdham Down but undertook to secure to the public free enjoyment of its property without charge, subject to certain conditions.[130] It thus gave to the public the use of property for which it could presumably have asked about £16,000, and it agreed to pay half the cost of the Act of Parliament, which amounted to £1,296.[131] The initiative in securing the Act had come from the City, but the Society had cooperated

[124] *H.B.22*, p. 207, 7 Dec. 1857; pp. 213, 215 ff., 8 Jan. 1858.

[125] *H.B.22*, pp. 300–2, 21 Jan. 1859; p. 308, 11 Feb. 1859.

[126] *H.B.22*, p. 310, 11 Feb. 1859. Among the Clerk's Papers in an envelope marked "Trespass on Durdham Down" are a number of documents referring to this matter and a cutting from the *Daily Press*, 9 Feb. 1859, mentioning "the serious and unsightly alterations which have been made in Durdham Down, just beyond the Turnpike at the end of Pembroke Road". The cutting states that it is understood that the responsibility is not the Society's but the individual who claims the land as his property.

[127] *H.B.22*, p. 420, 13 Jan. 1860.

[128] *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 216, 26 Jan. 1860.

[129] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 318.

[130] *H.B.23*, pp. 30, 31, 13 July 1860.

[131] *H.B.23*, p. 51, 20 Aug. 1860; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 318.

very generously in providing this immense benefit for the people of Bristol.

The Standing Committe of the Society approved the Downs Bill on 13 December 1860, and the bill received the royal assent on 17 May 1861.[132] At the end of the year, there took place the first meeting of the Downs Committee which was henceforth responsible for the preservation of the Downs. The Mayor was in the chair, and the committee consisted of six members appointed by the Town Council and six members appointed by the Merchant Venturers.[133]

The fact that the Hall nominated half the members of the Downs Committee meant that it continued to be very influential in managing the Downs. Moreover, as it still retained the ownership of half the area involved, it could exercise authority which was in some degree independent of the Downs Committee. Thus, it refused in 1861 to give permission to work iron ore on Clifton Down.[134] When there was a proposal in 1862 to make a road across the Downs, the Society reminded the Downs Committee that it still retained ownership of the site and that it wished to see the plans.[135] When F. W. and R. M. Lowe quarried on the land leased to them by the Society, they were told that this was contrary to their covenant to keep it as ornamental ground, and the Hall ordered that action should be taken to get a royalty and to restore the land.[136] The Society also kept an eye on proposals to erect monuments on the Downs. When Alderman Thomas Proctor wished to erect a drinking fountain at the top of Bridge Valley Road to commemorate the Society's appropriation to the public of Clifton Down, the Building Land Committee asked that the design should be suitable for the neighbourhood and afford some shelter from the rain.[137]

One particularly valuable service which the Society rendered to Bristol was in connection with the Cabot centenary. In 1897, the Cabot Celebration Committee was anxious to erect a column, tower, obelisk or "some other suitable object of imposing character" on Clifton Down, and it suggested that the Society should let it be erected in place of the Observatory. Fortunately, several residents in Clifton petitioned the Society to preserve the Observatory, and the Society turned down the proposal, although it was willing to let the monument be erected elsewhere on the Downs.[138] It had the same objection to a proposal of Mr. Alfred Moseley of London to erect on Observatory Hill a monument to the memory of the officers and men of local regiments who fell in the South African War, and it pointed out that the Society always objected to buildings or monuments on the hill.[139]

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[132] *H.B.23*, p. 80, 13 Dec. 1860; Elizabeth Ralph, *The Downs*.

[133] See Society's archives: *Downs Committee Book 1861–1929* (in fact the first book goes up only to 1879). Both the Town Council and the Society had copies of the Minutes of this Joint Committee.

[134] *H.B.23*, p. 170, 13 Dec. 1861.

[135] *H.B.23*, p. 191, 14 Feb. 1862; p. 197, 20 Feb. 1862.

[136] *H.B.24*, p. 237, 21 Feb. 1868.

[137] *H.B.24*, p. 304, 30 Dec. 1868; p. 343, 18 June 1869; p. 357, 15 Sept. 1869. The fountain was erected in 1872. Earlier the Society had considered a proposal for the Rev. Mourant Brock to put a fountain at the entrance to Bridge Approach Road. They thought his original plan unsatisfactory and asked for something "less heavy". The new plan was approved in 1867 (*H.B.24*, p. 107, 20 July 1866; p. 154, 15 Jan. 1867).

In a number of other ways, the Society continued to show its interest in the Downs. Thus, in 1870 it gave £5 5s. to Charles Brightman to help erect two drinking fountains on Durdham Down "for the use of cricketers and others . . .".[140] In 1871, it provided £40 for planting trees, and in 1872, when William Poole King, secretary of the Downs Planting Committee, wrote to say that his Committee had planted 800 trees and wished to carry out further planting, the Society appreciated his plea that "it will redound more to the honor of the Merchant Venturers Society to add to the magnificent gift to the Public of Bristol of the use of their Downs, by rendering the locality more ornamental than by leaving that task to private exertion", and it agreed to contribute £30.[141] £50 was given in 1877 towards the cost of a new road from Stoke Park to Parry's Lane,[142] and £10 in 1883 to help the Downs Committee erect an obelisk and cenotaph to William Pitt in front of Manila House.[143] In 1886, the Society agreed to give 25 new seats at 21s. 6d. each, provided others gave another 25.[144]

It was fortunate for Bristol that in the nineteenth century when the city expanded rapidly and the temptation to build on the Downs became increasingly great, the ownership of over half the Downs remained in the hands of a corporation which on the whole appreciated the amenities they offered and which was much less tempted than private individuals would have been to develop them for housing.

One other piece of preservation in which the Society had some interest may also be noted briefly. On the Somerset side of the river, Leigh Woods constituted another of Bristol's amenities. In 1864, the Society received a deputation from a number of gentlemen who proposed to form a Limited Liability Company to buy Sir Greville Smythe's portion of the woods. They urged the Hall to support the project "not merely as having in view a public benefit by preserving the ornamental character of the sloping Woodland but also as being in all probability fairly remunerative". The Society agreed to subscribe £2,500.[145]

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[138] *H.B.28*, p. 203, 29 Jan. 1897; pp. 209, 212, 26 Feb. 1897.

[139] *H.B.28*, pp. 381, 382, 21 Dec. 1900.

[140] *H.B.24*, p. 443, 5 Aug. 1870.

[141] *H.B.25*, p. 115, 29 Dec. 1871; p. 195, 21 Dec. 1872.

[142] *H.B.26*, p. 158, 21 Dec. 1877.

[143] *H.B.27*, p. 10, 1 June 1883.

[144] *H.B.27*, p. 157, 26 March 1886.

THE SUSPENSION BRIDGE

In 1753, William Vick, a merchant of Bristol, devised to the Society in trust the sum of £1,000 to build a bridge over the Avon from Clifton to Leigh Woods. The capital was to accumulate at interest until it reached £10,000, when the bridge was to be built. The Society received the money in two instalments in 1772 and 1779, and paid interest of 3 per cent. When the Charity Commissioners investigated the charity in 1822, the capital had accumulated to £4,139 8s. 9d.[146]

In the eighteen-twenties, the Chamber of Commerce pressed for action over the bridge.[147] The Society pointed out that the fund would not reach £10,000 until 1834, and that it would in any case be inadequate, but it nevertheless decided to get plans and estimates and to take steps to get an Act of Parliament in cooperation with the Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce and the Governor of St. Peter's Hospital. Characteristically, it thought the task should be entrusted to commissioners and not to a Joint Stock Company. It did a great deal of preparatory work, and eventually an Act was obtained in 1831.[148] The Treasurer then paid over to the Bridge Trustees the sum of £8,708 13s. 10d. and discharged the Society's obligation under the Vick bequest.[149]

Although the Society was no longer directly involved, it cooperated by making land available on Clifton Down for the approach from the Clifton side.[150] Unfortunately, the scheme ran into financial difficulties, and by 1843, when another £30,000 was still required, it was in effect given up.[151] In 1853, the Society decided to treat with the trustees concerning the land given for the Suspension Bridge, "it being understood that the idea of completing the Bridge is now wholly abandoned".[152]

In 1860, the matter came alive again when a new company was formed. Its honorary secretary, Captain Claxton, formally requested that the Master's name might be included in the preliminary prospectus, and the Hall agreed to take 50 £10 shares and to allow the first meeting of the shareholders to be held in the Hall on 2 August 1860.[153] It turned down an offer of another 50 shares, but cooperated in making land available on the Clifton side, and members of the Society formed part of the great procession for the formal opening of the bridge on 8 December 1864.[154]

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[145] *H.B.23*, p. 383, 28 Sept. 1864.

[146] *H.B.15*, pp. 223 ff., 3 April 1822.

[147] *H.B.16*, pp. 286 ff., 15 Aug. 1828; pp. 338 ff., 28 Aug. 1829. The matter had been raised earlier in *Letters of Cosmo.*

[148] *H.B.16*, p. 385, 16 April 1830; p. 412, 1 Oct. 1830; p. 416, 29 Oct. 1830; *H.B.17*, p. 1, 10 Dec. 1830; Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 258–9; *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 131 ff.

[149] *H.B.17*, p. 1, 10 Dec. 1830; p. 6, 7 Jan. 1831. The Treasurer had to take up £4,500 on bond in order to do this.

[150] *H.B.18*, p. 248, 12 Oct. 1838.

[151] Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 132, 133.

[152] *H.B.21*, p. 291, 18 Feb. 1853.

THE SOCIETY AND THE CHURCH

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Society of Merchant Venturers continued to show interest in the Church of England to which most of its members belonged, and it made a large number of donations towards the maintenance of existing buildings and the provision of new churches for an expanding population.

The problem of maintenance and restoration was a very serious one for the ecclesiastical authorities, and as the Society's financial position improved in the second half of the century, it made a considerable number of grants to help in this work. Thus, St. Mary Redcliffe received £100 in 1858,[155] and seven years later £500 was voted for the restoration of the tower and spire.[156] There were further donations of £250 in 1870 and £500 in 1874.[157] Help was also given for work on Bristol Cathedral in 1859 and 1861,[158] and in 1866 when an appeal was launched for £30,000 for the building of the nave, the Society agreed to give £750 in three instalments over three years, provided £10,000 a year was raised from other sources.[159] There were further grants of £100 in 1870 and of £500 in 1871.[160] When it was proposed to secure an Act of Parliament to restore a separate see to Bristol in 1884, the Society agreed to provide £1,000.[161] In 1892, £1,000 was voted in three annual instalments for restoration work in the Cathedral,[162] and in 1899 £250 was donated towards an appeal, provided the total of £3,000 was reached.[163] A little earlier, in 1897, the Society contributed 100 guineas to the Duchess of Beaufort's fund for a reredos in Bristol Cathedral to mark the retirement of bishop Charles John Ellicott.[164]

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[153] *H.B.23*, p. 17, 11 May 1860; p. 137, 5 July 1860; *Claxton's Journal I*, p. 217, 11 May 1860.

[154] *H.B.23*, pp. 336, 337, 29 Jan. 1864; p. 343, 23 Feb. 1864; *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 17, 8 Dec. 1864; Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 376, 377.

[155] *H.B.22*, p. 214, 8 Jan. 1858.

[156] *H.B.24*, p. 48, 22 Dec. 1865.

[157] *H.B.24*, p. 433, 3 June 1870; *H.B.25*, p. 334, 26 June 1874.

[158] *H.B.22*, pp. 411, 412, 8 Dec. 1859; *H.B.23*, p. 119, 3 April 1861.

[159] *H.B.24*, p. 115, 17 Aug. 1866. See also *H.B.24*, p. 123, 20 Oct. 1866.

[160] *H.B.25*, p. 24, 7 Dec. 1870; p. 113, 29 Dec. 1871.

[161] *H.B.27*, p. 40, 25 Jan. 1884. See Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, pp. 492, 493, for the re-establishment of the see.

[162] *H.B.27*, pp. 437, 438, 24 June 1892.

[163] *H.B.28*, p. 317, 26 May 1899.

Donations to St. Stephen's, the parish in which the Hall was situated and where the annual Charter Day service was held, included £300 for the restoration of the west window in 1864,[165] a grant of £100 in 1866 when the parish was in debt and the churchwardens were threatened with legal proceedings,[166] and another gift of £300 in 1875.[167] Among the other grants to existing churches were £250 to help renovate Dowry Chapel in 1872, and 20 guineas to St. Philip and Jacob's parish to enable it to remove "the whole of the present pauper benches and the high, narrow and uncomfortable pews" and to replace them by open seats of the same kind throughout the church.[168] In 1877, £25 was donated to the restoration fund of St. Michael's and £100 to the restoration of St. Philip and Jacob's.[169] The Society also gave £200 for restoring the tower of Temple Church and £100 for restoring the Abbey Gate House in 1884.[170] Presumably the motives for some of these gifts were mixed, as they had been in 1828 when £10 was donated towards the cost of an illuminated clock to strike the hours and quarters on the tower of St. Nicholas church, since this would also be "of use to Trade".[171]

In addition to helping in the restoration of existing churches the Society played a part in the remarkable extension of church building in and around Bristol. Most of its donations naturally went to the Church of England, but on at least one occasion it found good reason for assisting the Wesleyan Methodists. In 1831, Mr. Ward applied on behalf of that Society for permission to buy a plot of land facing Limekiln Dock to build a chapel and a school. The Hall asked for £100 and a ground rent of £21 a year, but when the Methodists were unable to offer more than £10 a year ground rent, the Society accepted its offer on certain conditions, including widening of the road. In 1833, when the Methodists had raised £1,200 out of the £2,000 required, the Society contributed £20 to the fund in view of "the material improvement to all the adjacent property" and "the moral improvement to the numerous poor tenantry".[172]

Donations to new building by the Church of England included

[164] *H.B.28*, p. 223, 28 May 1897.
[165] *H.B.23*, p. 403, 7 Dec. 1864.
[166] *H.B.24*, pp. 133, 134, 3 Nov. 1866.
[167] *H.B.26*, p. 8, 30 Oct. 1875.
[168] *H.B.25*, p. 149, 24 May 1872.
[169] *H.B.26*, p. 142, 28 Sept. 1877; p. 146, 26 Oct. 1877.
[170] *H.B.27*, p. 72, 24 Oct. 1884.
[171] *H.B.16*, pp. 274, 275, 2 April 1828.
[172] *H.B.17*, p. 81, 7 March 1832; p. 84, 8 March 1832; pp. 96, 97, 9 April 1832; p. 171, 18 Oct. 1833.

£50 in 1840 for a chapel of ease near King's Parade;[173] £20 to Christ Church, Clifton, which was consecrated in 1841;[174] £50 in 1844 for a new church at Pill, and £100 in 1852 to a new church which the Reverend John Hensman was erecting in Whiteladies Road.[175] Mr. Hensman subsequently acquired the Methodist Chapel at Jacob's Wells in order to make the premises into a new church. The Society sold him the fee farm rents of £10 and £4 a year for £300 but made a donation of £150 towards the cost of the new church.[176] When a number of people in Clifton decided in 1859 to erect a chapel of ease to commemorate Mr. Hensman's services for over fifty years, the Society agreed to sell for £400 a quarter of an acre in Victoria Square for the Hensman Memorial Church and then returned £200 as a donation.[177] £50 had been subscribed in the previous year to an appeal for setting up a new chapel in the precincts of the Bristol Royal Infirmary,[178] and in 1861 £25 was donated for a small church or chapel adjoining the Bristol Female Penitentiary.[179]

The continuing growth of Clifton made it desirable to establish yet another church, and in May 1864 the Standing Committee approved a grant of £500 for what was to be All Saints church.[180] One of the building lots in Victoria Square was assigned for a parsonage as a gift from the Society.[181] In 1866, the Society contributed £50 for a new church in Tyndall's Park to be erected on the site of a temporary iron church.[182] Next year, the Standing Committee recommended a grant of up to £200 to provide a clock with three bells for the Guthrie Memorial Chapel at Clifton College, but for some reason this was not approved by the General Hall.[183] In 1869, the Society contributed £50 for the building of St. Gabriel's Church in one of the poorer out-parishes of St. Philip and Jacob,[184] and two years later the same amount was given for a church at Moorfields.[185]

In 1877 the Society voted £600 towards the cost of a new and larger church in Clifton Wood to replace an earlier one which had been built by the Methodists in 1833 and which had subsequently been acquired by the Church of England,[186] and six years later it contributed £100 to the extension of the Church of the Holy Nativity in Knowle.[187]

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[173] *H.B.18*, pp. 432, 433, 10 April 1840.

[174] *H.B.19*, p. 291, 4 Oct. 1842.

[175] *H.B.21*, pp. 277, 278, 10 Dec. 1852.

[176] *H.B.21*, p. 385, 12 May 1854; p. 434, 22 Nov. 1854; p. 452, 2 July 1855.

[177] *H.B.22*, p. 378, 26 Aug. 1859; p. 400, 4 Nov. 1859.

[178] *H.B.22*, pp. 231, 232, 12 March 1858.

[179] *H.B.23*, p. 149, 13 Sept. 1861.

[180] *H.B.23*, p. 363, 31 May 1864. See also p. 366, 6 June 1864; *H.B.24*, p. 54, 19 Jan. 1866.

[181] *H.B.23*, pp. 420, 421, 1 Feb. 1865.

[182] *H.B.24*, p. 72, 16 March 1866.

[183] *H.B.24*, p. 153, 15 Jan. 1867; p. 168, 13 April 1867.

[184] *H.B.24*, p. 339, 28 April 1869. St. Gabriel's, Easton, was consecrated on 14 March 1870.

[185] *H.B.25*, p. 84, 16 Aug. 1871. St. Matthew's, Moorfields, was consecrated on 28 Jan. 1873.

In 1882, Bishop Ellicott called a public meeting at the Guildhall to consider a report on the need for new churches in the rapidly growing suburbs, and it was decided to build six new churches and three chapels.[188] A fund of £19,000 was raised, and to this the Society contributed £2,500 spread over five years.[189]

Miscellaneous grants connected with religion included an annual subscription of £20 to help the chaplain at the Bristol Royal Infirmary,[190] and a donation of 20 guineas in 1839 towards the cost of a vessel for the Bristol Channel Mission Society so that crews of ships at Kingroad, Portishead, Penarth Road, Flat Holm and Steep Holm might have public worship conducted by a clergyman of the Church of England.[191] On the other hand, when the Secretary of the Seamen's Friendly Society asked in 1824 that the ship *Mary*, late of New York, now fitted up as a seamen's chapel and christened the *Clifton Ark*, might be put in the Floating Dock, it was decided to turn down the request as it would cause great inconvenience.[192] In 1881, however, Mr. Vicary was more fortunate and was given permission to erect his gospel tent in the Bonding Yard, subject to one day's notice.[193]

The list of donations given above is by no means exhaustive but it is sufficient to show that the Society took seriously its obligations to the established church to which its members belonged. The religious as well as the political character of the Society help to explain why it did not include among its members some of the wealthiest men in nineteenth-century Bristol who were Nonconformist in religion and Liberal in politics.

COMMUNICATIONS

Although the Society gradually abandoned its direct interest in commerce during the nineteenth century, it still retained some interest in communication, particularly during the first half of the period.

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[186] *H.B.26*, p. 128, 29 June 1877. The new church was consecrated in 1882 (see Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 345).

[187] *H.B.27*, p. 72, 24 Oct. 1884.

[188] See Latimer, *Nineteenth Century Annals*, p. 517.

[189] *H.B.26*, pp. 400, 401, 24 Feb. 1882. The money was given to the Church Building Fund for special objects designated by the Society. See also *H.B.27*, p. 122, 26 June 1885 (Holy Nativity, Knowle) and *H.B.27*, p. 233, 23 Dec. 1887 (St. Thomas, Eastville).

[190] *H.B.14*, p. 422, 28 Jan. 1817.

[191] *H.B.18*, p. 318, 12 April 1839.

[192] *H.B.15*, p. 401, 7 May 1824.

[193] *H.B.26*, p. 357, 27 May 1881.

Canals were not of much concern to it, although in 1826 it petitioned in favour of the Berkshire and Hampshire Junction Canal[194] and protested between 1832 and 1834 against government action and proposed legislation concerning the Gloucester–Berkeley Canal, which was alleged to be to the detriment of the trade of Bristol.[195]

Railways, on the other hand, attracted more interest from at least some members of the Society, and at the end of 1832 the Standing Committee came to the cautious conclusion that "the Subject of a Railroad from Bristol to London which has been of late the Subject of much public discussion is worthy of consideration". A sub-committee of three was set up to confer with other public bodies for inquiry only.[196] The sub-committee reported in February 1833 that the proposed railway "would infallibly tend in a very extensive degree to improve the Trade and Commerce of the City," and the Standing Committee approved its report and recommended contributing 200 guineas towards the cost of obtaining surveys and estimates.[197] In February 1834, a General Hall at which 11 members were present approved a petition to Parliament in favour of a bill for making the portions of the Great Western Railway between Bristol and Bath and between London and Reading,[198] and in September the Hall decided to confer the freedom on Henry Charles Somerset, Lord Granville, in recognition of the obliging way in which he had undertaken the case of the Great Western Railway Bill in Parliament.[199] Two months later, the Great Western Railway Company informed the Society that the Corporation had taken a hundred shares in the Company, and the Society decided that it too would take a hundred shares of £100 each.[200] A year later, the Hall decided to dispose of its investment and the Great Western Railway Company agreed to repay 200 guineas which the Hall had contributed to the cost of the survey. The Company expressed its gratitude to the Society for the "public countenance" it had given to the scheme.[201]

Encouragement was also given to the Bristol and Exeter Railway

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[194] *H.B.16*, p. 116, 1 March 1826.

[195] *H.B.17*, p. 83, 7 March 1832; p. 103, 13 June 1832; p. 218, 2 April 1834; p. 224, 7 May 1834.

[196] *H.B.17*, p. 137, 8 Dec. 1832. The sub-committee consisted of Mr. Maze, Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Fowler.

[197] *H.B.17*, p. 146, 20 Feb. 1833.

[198] *H.B.17*, p. 213, 26 Feb. 1834.

[199] *H.B.17*, p. 259, 3 Sept. 1834 (11 present).

[200] *H.B.17*, p. 273, 8 Nov. 1834 (22 present).

[201] *H.B.17*, p. 339, 14 Oct. 1835. The "public countenance" which the Society gave to the G.W.R. Company included placing the Hall at the disposal of the Directors for a number of meetings, and this is commemorated in a well-known picture.

Company which was allowed to hold its first General Meeting in the Hall in 1836,[202] and to the Bristol and Gloucester Railway Company in 1837 when the Hall agreed to petition both Houses in favour of an application to extend the line to Gloucester.[203] In 1844, the Society opposed the South Wales, Wiltshire, Somerset and Weymouth Railway on the grounds that it would inflict great injury on the trade of Bristol,[204] but ten years later it agreed to give countenance and support to the Bristol, South Wales and Southampton Union Railway, since this was considered beneficial to the city.[205]

In the eighteen-sixties, the Society showed some interest in the Bristol and Clifton Railway Company which proposed to extend the railway into the City,[206] and in 1883 it agreed to contribute £300 towards the cost of the London and South Wales Junction Railway bill.[207]

Communications with Ireland were also of concern to the Society in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the eighteen-twenties and early eighteen-thirties there were hopes in Bristol that the Treasury would agree to establish a Steam Packet Station at Portishead or elsewhere for mails to and from Ireland, and the Chamber of Commerce was active in pressing the matter. The Society supported the proposal, drew up a number of Memorials and sent witnesses to a Commons Committee in 1832, but there were obvious difficulties unless considerable capital was expended, and the proposal came to nothing.[208] It was revived in the early eighteen-forties when the Society cooperated with the Corporation and other bodies in trying to get Bristol chosen instead of Milford Haven as a Mail Packet Station for Southern Ireland. The Society provided some money and sent witnesses to London in support of the City's case, but again the effort was unsuccessful.[209]

The Society also played a part in efforts made in the late eighteen-thirties and early eighteen-forties to persuade the government to designate Bristol as a port for the West Indian and transatlantic mails. It cooperated with the Royal West Indian Steam Packet Committee, which was chaired by one of its members, Philip Protheroe; it collected evidence from a number of witnesses, including Brunel, and it sent the Clerk, Robert Osborne, and Christopher Claxton to London to confer with the M.P.s and to press Bristol's case.[210] The effort was unsuccessful. Another attempt was made in 1864 when the Society sent the Master, Wardens and other members to London to join with what Claxton scornfully called "the Chamber of Commerce people" in pressing Bristol's case. Nothing was achieved and Claxton remarked "just serve 'em right – misled by the beasts of the Chamber of Commerce".[211]

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[202] *H.B.17*, p. 398, 8 June 1836.

[203] *H.B.18*, p. 16, 10 Feb. 1837 (12 present).

[204] *H.B.20*, p. 71, 22 Nov. 1844; p. 72, 29 Nov. 1844.

[205] *H.B.21*, p. 416, 13 Oct. 1854.

[206] *H.B.23*, p. 156, 11 Oct. 1861; p. 168, 13 Dec. 1861; p. 173, 2 Jan. 1862; p. 186, 22 Jan. 1862. See also *H.B.25*, p. 43, 22 March 1871.

[207] *H.B.26*, pp. 455, 456, 26 Jan. 1883; pp. 457, 458, 27 Jan. 1883.

[208] *H.B.16*, p. 191, 2 March 1827; p. 319, 6 March 1829; p. 334, 14 Aug. 1829, p. 337, 28 Aug. 1829; *H.B.17*, pp. 93, 94, 4 April 1832; p. 98, 2 May 1832; p. 102; 13 June 1832.

[209] *H.B.19*, p. 107, 10 May 1841; p. 109, 22 May 1841; p. 114, 11 June 1841; p. 138, 17 Aug. 1841; p. 188, 27 Nov. 1841; p. 233, 6 April 1842.

Miscellaneous activities in connection with communications included protesting in 1834 to the Postmaster General against a proposal to send the Irish Mail coach through Gloucester instead of through Bristol;[212] cooperating with the Great Western Railway Company, the Town Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the Docks Company in 1837 to discuss the establishment of "steam intercourse with India via the Mediterranean through Bristol";[213] joint action in protesting to the Post Master General against the removal of the Welsh Mails from Bristol in 1845;[214] encouragement to the British Electric Telegraph Company to lay a telegraph between Bristol and Pill in 1850 and between Shirehampton and the Commercial Rooms in 1852;[215] and despatching a Memorial to the Postmaster General in 1854 on delays in foreign and colonial mails and requesting much more frequent and regular communication with South Wales with which Bristol was carrying on "a most important and extending trade".[216] In the later part of the century, the Society kept a watchful eye on the effects of tramway development.[217]

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[210] *H.B.18*, p. 391, 8 Nov. 1839; *H.B.19*, pp. 32, 33, 30 Sept. 1840; pp. 35 ff., 7 Oct. 1840; p. 76, 8 Jan. 1841; p. 105, 10 May 1841; p. 420, 9 Feb. 1844; p. 450, 30 May 1844.

[211] *H.B.23*, p. 356, 8 April 1864; p. 358, 26 April 1864; *Claxton's Journal II*, p. 9, 11 April 1863.

[212] *H.B.17*, pp. 228, 229, 7 May 1834.

[213] *H.B.18*, p. 15, 10 Feb. 1837.

[214] *H.B.20*, p. 113, 9 May 1845.

[215] *H.B.21*, p. 101; 13 Dec. 1850; p. 211, 13 Dec. 1852. The Warner at Pill petitioned the Society in 1852 saying that the telegraph had put him out of business, but the petition was laid on the table (*H.B.21*, pp. 278, 279, 10 Dec. 1852).

[216] *H.B.21*, p. 354, 6 Jan. 1854; p. 362, 11 Feb. 1854.

[217] *H.B.26*, p. 233, 31 Jan. 1879; p. 283, 19 Dec. 1879; p. 295, 19 March 1880.

CHAPTER 23

Membership, Organisation and Finance in the Twentieth Century

THE total number of admissions to the Society between 1900 and 1974 was 140, just under two a year. Thus, the rate of recruitment was lower than it had been in the nineteenth century when 221 members had been admitted.[1] There was also a significant change in the method of recruitment. Of the 140 members admitted between 1900 and 1974, 29 took up the freedom by patrimony or by apprenticeship; 16 entered as honorary members, and 95 were redemptioners.[2] There was thus a marked contrast with the position in the nineteenth century when those admitted by redemption were more or less equal in number to those who entered by patrimony or by apprenticeship. In the list of admissions after 1900 redemptioners outnumbered the others by over three to one. It appears that the Society was becoming more outward-looking and was drawing more heavily on those outside the established Merchant Venturer families. It is also significant in this connection that the freedom was conferred on 16 distinguished honorary members, whereas between 1864 and 1900, no new names had been added to the list.

The slower rate of recruitment produced a drop in the total number of members, although there were fluctuations in these seventy years. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the total varied between 70 and 75, but after that there was a gradual decline up to 1918. In 1917 for example, the number had fallen to 58.[3] In 1919 and 1920, 17 new members were added to the list, and between 1920 and 1939, membership fluctuated between 70 and 80.[4] Between 1945 and 1970, it varied between 60 and 65, and on occasions it fell below 60.[5]

The number attending the quarterly meetings averaged between 24 and 25 in the years 1900–18, but rose in the inter-war years to between 28 and 29. It fell to just over 22 during World War II when

[1] See p. 249.

[2] Some of these redemptioners *could* have asked for the freedom by patrimony or by apprenticeship.

[3] *H.B.30*, pp. 322, 377, 28 July 1917, 10 Nov. 1917.

[4] On 10 Nov. 1924, it was 80 (*H.B.31*, f. 259). It was down to 70 on 28 Jan. 1938 (*H.B.33*, p. 76).

[5] E.g. 57 on 28 April 1950 (*H.B.34*, p. 374) and 59 on 24 Oct. 1969 (*H.B.40*, p. 155).

a number of members were on active service, but rose to over 29 in the period 1946–69. It was not until 1968 that the Society laid down that members were free to resign,[6] and there must always have been on the roll some who were unable to attend through age, ill-health or because they had moved away from Bristol.[7] In 1966, when the Master congratulated the Senior Commoner, Charles Cyril Clarke, on the completion of sixty years as a member, he noted that only 23 members had been present at the Hall at which he had been admitted. Since then, there had been a change of spirit over attendance, and few had done more to bring it about than Charles Cyril Clarke.[8]

The Society concerned itself from time to time with the question of how many members should be admitted and what kind of people they should be. In 1921, it discussed the matter with reference to redemptioners, because it was thought that the Hall could not conveniently accommodate many more members and that it was important to provide room for others besides redemptioners. The general opinion was that redemptioners should be "gentlemen who being otherwise duly qualified had an assured position or had made their mark either in the Public or Commercial life of the City or had distinguished themselves elsewhere in the service of the state".[9] This appears to have extended considerably the guide line laid down in 1873 when it was thought that redemptioners should be "only persons belonging to the mercantile community".[10]

In 1930, a sub-committee was set up to consider whether there should be any change in the rules and orders. This made a number of recommendations relating to the Assistants and to the conditions for admission by apprenticeship. It also examined the alleged right of sons of members and apprentices of members to be admitted without a vote of the Hall. It reported that although there was no definite rule requiring such applicants to be elected by a vote of the majority of those present at the Hall, this had invariably been the practice, and that the words "voted and ordered" in the Minutes recording such admissions supported this interpretation. It thought that the Hall could in fact veto any such admissions and that the rule should in future be that "no person seeking admission as a Member of this Society by virtue of any qualification whatsoever be admitted as a Member except upon the vote of 3/4th of the Members present at the Hall".[11] The proposals were confirmed at a General Hall later in the year.[12]

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[6] See p. 445 and note 18.

[7] In 1961, the Treasurer was asked to write to all members who, it seemed probable, would never again attend meetings to say that unless they notified the Treasurer, notices would not in future be sent to them.

[8] *H.B.39*, p. 137, 29 April 1966 (36 members were present).

[9] *H.B.31*, p. 93, 29 Jan. 1921; p. 97, 25 Feb. 1921.

[10] See p. 252.

The question of membership was discussed again in 1945 when the Master asked the Hall to consider extending the range of those suitable for admission to include gentlemen other than those engaged in purely mercantile business.[13] The sub-committee's report of 26 April 1946 was considered by the Hall on 31 May 1946 and the Hall saw no reason to add to or to modify the decisions made in 1873 and 1921.[14]

In 1966, some members felt that it might be desirable to have powers to admit men who were not freemen of Bristol. The Clerk pointed out that the freedom of Bristol was obtained by birth, by marriage to the daughter or the widow of a freeman, or by serving a seven-year apprenticeship. It was fundamental to the constitution of the Society that members must be freemen of Bristol, but he had communicated with the Privy Council Office to see if it would be possible to obtain a new charter. There was no objection in principle, and the Clerk thought that there might possibly be two classes of members – those who were freemen of Bristol and those who were not, but no action was taken.[15]

At the end of 1967, the Master again raised the question of admissions, and a memorandum drawn up by himself, the Senior Warden and the First Assistant was circulated and discussed by the Standing Committee during the next six months.[16] A Memorandum on the subject was considered by the Hall on 26 July 1968 and a number of resolutions were adopted. The Memorandum pointed out that the Society had originally been founded as a community of merchants to further their trading interests. Traditionally, membership of the merchant community had been the basis of membership, but for many years the influence and activities of the Society had been directed for the benefit of the citizens of Bristol in general rather than for the support of the trade of its members. In the last fifty years, there had been a marked change in the structure of industry and trade in Bristol. The relatively small merchant firms whose proprietors formed the nucleus of the Society's members had been replaced by modern large units of industry in which heredity in management played little part. The guiding principles for admission in future should be to preserve the status and usefulness of the Society, but at the same time to preserve the traditions of the Hall, provided they were not incompatible with the first objective. It was resolved that as a supplement to the existing arrangements the Master, Wardens and First Assistant should keep under review the list of apprentices to members and should, if they thought it necessary, "seek out suitably qualified men, who, if they agree, should be apprenticed on the understanding that no guarantee was given that they would be admitted, but there there was a reasonable likelihood".[17] It was pointed out that this was likely to bring in members at a later age than at present, and so in the choice of officers, there should be less emphasis on seniority in the Hall and more on the qualities of leadership and distinction in public and business life. In considering the list of apprentices and candidates for admission, the guilding lines should be whether the candidate was likely in personality and conduct to be congenial to other members, whether he had achieved or was likely to achieve a position of responsibility and importance in the commercial life of Bristol and its neighbourhood, and whether he had performed useful voluntary service. As far as possible, membership should represent "the wide-spread nature of the City's industries". At the same time, it should be recognised that the succession of sons was a source of strength in maintaining status and tradition, and preference was to be given to them when two or more candidates were of equal merit. There was to be no set limit to numbers, but this was to be kept under review in relation to the available accommodation. Members were in future free to resign if they wished and might indicate if they no longer wanted to receive invitations to functions.[18]

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[11] *H.B.32*, pp. 158 ff., 16 July 1931.

[12] *H.B.32*, p. 177, 30 Oct. 1931.

[13] *H.B.33*, p. 418, 27 July 1945; *H.B.34*, p. 7, 26 Oct. 1945; p. 16, 30 Nov. 1945.

[14] *H.B.34*, p. 50, 31 May 1946.

[15] *H.B.39*, p. 124, 11 Feb. 1966. It must be remembered that for entry to the Society by apprenticeship, a man had to be apprenticed to a Merchant Venturer before the end of his eighteenth year and must be related to the member to whom he was apprenticed in the degree not more distant than first cousin, or failing that, pay to the Treasurer £25 for admission. The rules relating to such apprenticeships were made rather easier in 1931 (*H.B.32*, pp. 161 ff., 16 July 1931). Redemptioners also had to have the freedom of Bristol, and this they would normally obtain by being bound apprentice to a freeman for seven years. Many of them would enter on this apprenticeship at a time when they were already of mature years.

[16] *H.B.40*, p. 21, 12 Jan. 1968; p. 28, 23 Feb. 1968; p. 30, 8 March 1968; p. 38, 26 April 1968; p. 39, 17 May 1968.

The resolutions adopted in 1968 gave formal recognition to a policy which had in practice been followed much earlier. The significant growth in the number of redemptioners in the twentieth century and the attempt to bring in men who were prominent in the industrial and public life of Bristol meant that the Society was increasingly moving away from the policy of restricting membership to families which were traditionally associated with commerce in the narrow sense, and was seeking to include representatives of many different interests in business and public life. It was adapting itself to the changing structure of Bristol's commerce and industry, while at the same time seeking to maintain its traditions by recognising the value of an hereditary element among its members.

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[17] What the Society had in mind here was not the apprenticeship of young men under 19, but of older people who were considered suitable candidates for membership in the future.

[18] *H.B.40*, pp. 54 ff., 26 July 1968. Major A. B. Mitchell resigned in 1968 and the second Lord Dulverton in 1969 (*H.B.40*, pp. 67, 125, 140), and R. E. Todd in 1971, shortly before he died (*H.B.40*, p. 278, 29 Oct. 1971).

Between 1900 and 1919 only two people were admitted to the freedom as honorary members – Field-Marshal Earl Roberts and the 9th Duke of Beaufort.[19] In January 1919, a sub-committee recommended that the freedom should be offered to the Rt. Honourable Charles Edward Hungerford Atholl Colston, Baron Roundway; to the Rt. Honourable Lewis Fry; to Sir Herbert Warren; to Mr. George Alfred Wills, and, if they came to Bristol, to Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and Admiral Sir David Beatty. Baron Roundway was offered the freedom as a representative of the Colston family and in recognition of the interest he had always taken in the charitable and educational institutions in the care of the Society; Lewis Fry in recognition of his services to Bristol as an M.P. and of "the courtesy and ability with which as one of the Founders of the University of Bristol he assisted in the settlement of the agreement between the Society and the University". Sir Herbert Warren was President of Magdalen College Oxford, Chairman of the Council of Clifton College, a distinguished educationalist and a Bristolian by birth and education. George Alfred Wills was made a freeman in recognition of his services to the University as Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council.[20] The freedom was conferred on Sir Douglas Haig in April 1920.[21]

In June 1921 the freedom was conferred on the Prince of Wales who made appropriate references to Jay, Cabot and Newfoundland, and who remarked felicitously, if not with complete historical accuracy, that his travels had enabled him to realise in a very special manner "the part played by this Guild in those early days of exploration . . .".[22] Later in the same year, honorary membership was given to Henry Herbert Wills, pro-Chancellor of the Univesity, "in recognition of his munificence in the foundation and endowment of the St. Monica Home of Rest" and his great gifts to the University of Bristol and other educational and charitable institutions.[23]

The 9th Duke of Beaufort died in 1925 and the freedom was in due course conferred upon the 10th Duke.[24] Four years later, W. Melville Wills became an honorary member.[25] The 1st Lord Dulverton, who received the freedom in 1930, was later admitted as a redemptioner on payment of a fine of £50 in 1938.[26]

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[19] *H.B.29*, p. 61, 24 Oct. 1903; p. 89, 29 April 1904, the Master reported that he had entertained Beaufort and Roberts to dinner on 15 April.

[20] *H.B.30*, p. 410, 24 Jan. 1919; p. 418, 1 Feb. 1919; p. 423, 28 Feb. 1919.

[21] *H.B.31*, p. 16, 19 Sept. 1919; p. 56, 15 April 1920.

[22] *H.B.31*, pp. 109–12, 20 May 1931. When the Prince of Wales became King, he informed the Society that he could no longer be an Honorary Member but would continue to give his patronage (*H.B.33*, p. 8, 26 June 1936).

[23] *H.B.31*, p. 127, 29 Oct. 1921.

After World War II, the Society followed its traditional practice of offering the freedom to outstanding war leaders and invited Winston Churchill and General Dwight D. Eisenhower to become honorary members.[27] Both of them had Bristol connections, for Churchill was Chancellor of the University and Eisenhower's headquarters before D Day had been in Clifton College. Churchill was admitted and signed the Hall Book on 21 June 1946,[28] but Eisenhower did not take up the freedom, although he apparently thought he was a member, for when he became President of the United States, he wrote regretting that as President he had to resign from all societies in which he could not participate. The Treasurer was instructed to send a suitable reply, bearing in mind that he had not formally been elected as an Honorary Member.[29]

On 6 November 1953, the Duke of Edinburgh visited the Hall and signed the book as an Honorary Member.[30] The ceremony was informal on this occasion, as had been the case when Churchill came to the Hall, but when the Duke visited the Hall in September 1954 an Address was presented to him, and in his reply he remarked "As you all know, I am neither a merchant nor a venturer, but perhaps for that very reason I have a great admiration for merchants and for venturers and an even greater admiration when the two are combined in one person."[31]

The most recent addition to the list of Honorary Members is Charles Prince of Wales who accepted the freedom of the Society in October 1973.

There is, of course, no such thing as "the typical Merchant Venturer" at the present time, since the Society does in fact represent a great range of interests and personalities in commercial, industrial and public life.[32] Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics which stand out. The majority of members attended public schools, and a considerable proportion are graduates of Oxford or

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[24] *H.B.31*, p. 274, 31 Jan. 1925; 288, 25 April 1925.

[25] *H.B.32*, p. 51, 29 April 1929.

[26] *H.B.32*, p. 119, 31 Oct. 1930; *H.B.33*, p. 88, 29 April 1939.

[27] *H.B.34*, pp. 27, 28, 25 Jan. 1946.

[28] *H.B.34*, pp. 52, 53.

[29] *H.B.35*, p. 312, 29 May 1953.

[30] *H.B.35*, p. 342, 25 Sept. 1953; p. 365, 6 Nov. 1953.

[31] *H.B.36*, pp. 17–20, 24 Sept. 1954.

[32] What follows is a very general impression based in part on information supplied by members in answer to a questionnaire sent out by the Treasurer in 1971.

Cambridge.[33] Many served with distinction in the army or navy in one or other, and sometimes both, of the two World Wars. Although there are no political or religious tests, most members appear to be Conservative in politics and Church of England in religion. Many have made and are making major contributions to voluntary public services of all kinds. The varied business interests of members include shipbuilding, the wine trade, the clothing trade, shoe-manufacturing, paint manufacturing, the steel industry, marine-engineering, printing, the tobacco industry and allied companies, the electrical industry and the aeroplane industry. Since some members obtain the freedom by patrimony and do not take up a business career, there are a few members who have had careers in the services or in one of the professions. A number of members hold the highest executive and managerial positions in large-scale enterprises in and around Bristol. The average age of members at present appears to be in the late fifties, with a small group in their thirties or forties and another small group in their seventies or eighties. About half the members first entered the Society over twenty years ago.

The Master of the Society has, during his year of office, the power to exercise considerable influence on policy, although he obviously must carry with him the majority of the Wardens and Standing Committee if he wishes to get his policies accepted by the general body of the Hall. Some Masters have used their initiative and powers of leadership in very important ways, but it would perhaps be invidious to try to single out from among more than 70 Masters who have held the office in the twentieth century those who have been particularly influential. It is, however, worth noting one or two unusual circumstances relating to the office of Master. There was a dramatic conclusion to the period of office of J. H. Budgett in 1918. Charter Day that year was 11 November, since 10 November was a Sunday. While the members of the Society were waiting for the beginning of the service in St. Stephen's church, the news arrived of the signing of the Armistice and the Society was informed from the pulpit that fighting had ceased.[34]

In 1925, the Standing Committee recommended that Mervyn K. King, should be Master for the next year and prepared an address to him for his eightieth birthday. He had been admitted in 1866 and had been Master in 1874–5. The Address referred to his family's long association with the Society and called him "the last of the Bristol Merchants who carried on trade by barter in their own vessels".[35]

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[33] One member was in the Oxford boat which sank in the Boat Race of 1925 and again when Oxford lost in 1926.

[34] There is in the Society's archives a bound volume in which the Master, J. H. Budgett, recorded the principal events during his year of office 1917–18.

[35] *H.B.31*, p. 303, 25 Sept. 1925. For a supplementary address to him in 1934,

However, he decided not to accept the Mastership. In 1927, the Hall congratulated the Master, Sir Lionel Goodenough Taylor, on receiving the honour of knighthood, an honour which it believed had never before been conferred on a Master while he was actually in office.[36] In 1933, when Alfred Esmond Robinson was Master, the Senior Warden informed the Hall that he would be unable to serve as Master, as urgent business would take him away from Bristol for a considerable time. The Junior Warden was also unable to serve, and so it was decided to ask A. E. Robinson to continue in office for another year.[37] In World War II, Ellison Fuller Eberle, who was chosen Master on 10 November 1939, was re-elected in 1940 and again in 1941,[38] and Foster Gotch Robinson served as Master for two years from 1943 to 1945.[39] An unusual situation also arose in 1962 when Commander Athelstan Paul Bush, who had held the office of Treasurer from 1944, retired from that office and was elected Master for the year 1962–3.[40]

The practice has grown up by which those going through the chair make a gift to the Society, often in the form of some work of modern craftsmanship, to add to the treasures which the Hall has acquired over the centuries.

The Master, the Wardens and the Assistants naturally exercise a great deal of control over the policy of the Society, although their decisions have to be confirmed by the commonalty as a whole. In the normal course of events, a man who played an active part in the affairs of the Society can hope to become an Assistant, a Junior Warden, a Senior Warden and the Master, and, inevitably, those who had been active members for a long time tend to know most about the Society's affairs and to have a large say in decisions.

Every autumn, the Master entertains the Standing Committee, the Clerk and the Senior Commoner to dinner. After dinner, the committee decides on the recommendations it wishes to make for the elections on Charter Day. Before the elections, the Senior Commoner asks the Standing Committee to retire and then goes

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see *H.B.32*, p. 348, 30 Nov. 1934. It summed up the ideals of the Society in these words: "Upon him was laid the burden of following in the tracks of those whose object it had been to symbolize in this Society all that makes for progress in the life of our City. . . ."

[36] *H.B.31*, p. 371, 28 Jan. 1927.

[37] *H.B.32*, p. 287, 29 Sept. 1933.

[38] *H.B.33*, p. 163, 10 Nov. 1939; p. 210, 11 Nov. 1940; p. 255, 10 Nov. 1941.

[39] *H.B.33*, p. 332, 10 Nov. 1943; p. 380, 10 Nov. 1944.

[40] *H.B.38*, p. 38, 30 March 1961; p. 160, 10 Nov. 1962. Commander Bush had become a member in 1939 and in the normal course of events might have expected to become Master earlier but for the fact that he was appointed Treasurer in 1944. The Senior Warden was quite willing to stand down on this occasion, and both the Senior and Junior Wardens were re-elected in 1962.

through with the commonalty the recommendations made by the committee.

It is rare for the policy of the Standing Committee to be reversed by the Hall, although this has happened with reference to one very controversial issue in recent years.

For the efficient running of its affairs, the Society continued to draw on the services of a number of very able Treasurers chosen from its own ranks. When George Henry Pope resigned in 1901 after twenty-five years in office, it was decided that his office should be separated from that of Correspondent and Manager of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and that there should be a Secretary to deal with the College, the Colston Trust and the two Colston Schools. Percy Liston King was then appointed Treasurer at £450 a year, and George Henry Pope, who had acquired an immense amount of experience in dealing with the educational problems, became Secretary of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and of the Colston charities. He was given a salary of £450 a year with an office and secretarial assistance in the Hall.[41]

When Percy Liston King died in 1914, he was succeeded by Col. John Henry Woodward who had considerable business experience in his father's firm of vinegar manufacturers and as director and chairman of the Bristol, West of England and South West Building Society and as director of the Bristol Waggon and Carriage Works Company. He had played a very active part in the volunteer and territorial movement and had become a full colonel in 1905. He had also been chairman of the Bristol School Board for 1892–8.[42] He had joined the Society in 1876 and became Master ten years later. He was appointed at a salary of £500 and was allowed to retain certain directorships.[43] Colonel Woodward became seriously ill in 1917 and died on 18 May 1918.[44] During his illness, H. Vincent Barnard acted as temporary treasurer.[45]

A sub-committee then recommended that the next Treasurer should be required to devote himself entirely to the work and to reside in the neighbourhood of Bristol. His office and that of the Secretary of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and the Colston Schools were eventually to be combined. Meanwhile, he was to have a salary of £800 a year, rising to not more than £1,000 when he took over the Secretaryships. It recommended the appointment of William Welsford Ward, and this was approved by a General

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[41] *H.B.28*, pp. 416–17, 11 Oct. 1901; p. 423, 26 Oct. 1901. The Treasurer's salary was increased to £550 a year in 1903 (*H.B.29*, p. 73, 27 Nov. 1903).

[42] *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 20 May 1918.

[43] *H.B.30*, p. 148, 23 Jan. 1914; p. 150, 30 Jan. 1914; p. 153, 31 Jan. 1914.

[44] *H.B.30*, p. 320, 27 July 1917; p. 324, 14 Aug. 1917; p. 379, 31 May 1918.

[45] *H.B.30*, p. 383, 26 July 1918.

Hall on 27 July 1918.[46] When George Henry Pope decided to resign his secretaryships in 1920, William Ward took over from 1 December at a total salary of £1,200 a year.[47]

W. W. Ward's appointment was in many respects unusual. He had been born at Stapleton, near Bristol, in 1854, and both at school at Radley and at Magdalen College, Oxford, he had made his mark as a classical scholar. One of his examiners had stressed that he ought to pursue a career in literature. At Magdalen, he had the nickname of "Bouncer" and was a close friend of Oscar Wilde.[48] Ward decided not to pursue a career in scholarship, and instead qualified as a solicitor in 1880. In 1882, he became a partner in the firm of which his father was a member – Osborne, Ward, Vassall & Co., which had a close connection with the Society, since Jere Osborne, the Senior partner, was Clerk to the Merchant Venturers. He became a Merchant Venturer himself in 1890 and was Master in 1896. He was very deeply involved in the negotiations between the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and University College, Bristol. In 1901, he retired from business and went to live at Mawnan Smith near Falmouth with his wife and two children. He lived the life of a country gentleman and was very active in local government and as a Magistrate for Cornwall. The upheaval of the First World War had an adverse effect on his financial circumstances, and he was not unduly unwilling to come out of retirement, provided congenial work was offered him, and so in 1918 as a result of persistent pressure from Mr. Mervyn K. King, he agreed to accept the Society's invitation to become its Treasurer.

W. W. Ward was clearly an outstanding personality with a great interest in educational and charitable work as well as in literature and philosophy. Although he did not initiate the arrangements which led to the Society accepting the trust for the very large funds made available for establishing the St. Monica Home of Rest, he was deeply involved in the very difficult negotiations and legal business which accompanied the setting up of the trust, and played a most important role both on a personal and a legal level in bringing them to a successful conclusion.[49] He steered the Society through a very difficult financial period in the early nineteen-twenties and played an initial role in setting up its Education Trust.[50] He was aware that the Society was wrongly considered by many people in Bristol to be little more than a wining and dining club, and he did all in his power to emphasise and develop its charitable and educational work. He was a very determined negotiator on the Society's behalf and he was a very "strong" Treasurer, but he had the capacity to win love and devotion from those who knew him well.[51] He died while still in office on 10 February 1932.[52]

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[46] *H.B.30*, p. 381, 28 June 1918; pp. 385, 386, 27 July 1918. In 1919, Ward's salary was raised to £1,000 a year with effect from the date of his appointment (*H.B.31*, p. 25, 17 Oct. 1919).

[47] *H.B.31*, pp. 85, 86, 26 Nov. 1920. Pope was asked to accept a retaining fee of £450 a year for life in return for his advice and experience. He died in 1930 (*H.B. 32*, p. 90, 25 Jan. 1930).

[48] For a number of letters from Oscar Wilde to Ward, see *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, edit. Rupert Hart Davis, 1962. Wilde urged Ward to read for a Fellowship and was certain he could get one. Ward's "Oxford Reminiscence" of Wilde was published as an appendix to Vyvyan Holland, *Son of Oscar Wilde*, 1954.

[49] See p. 514.

A sub-committee then considered the appointment of a new Treasurer and defined what his duties were to be.[53] There were 6 applicants, who were narrowed down to 2 – Gerald H. Beloe and Lieut. Col. Daniel Burges, V.C., D.S.O. The Standing Committee was equally divided, and the decision was eventually made by ballot at a General Hall.[54] The new Treasurer, Gerald Harry Beloe, had first joined the Society in 1906 and was Master in 1922–3. He too died in office on 10 October 1944. The Master spoke of his sense of humour, his ability to enjoy a joke against himself, his kindness and ability to radiate happiness and goodwill. In the last year of his life he faced with courage hard blows in his family life occasioned by the war.[55] Someone who knew him very well remarked that he was "a gentle, warm-hearted man, with a serenity that was almost infectious. By his very lack of aggressiveness, he was capable of winning cooperation from his associates."

Three other people have held the office of Treasurer up to the present time. Commander Athelstan Paul Bush, D.S.O., R.N. took office on 1 December 1944 and resigned in 1962; Edmund Poole King was Treasurer from 1962 to 1969; and the present Treasurer, John Esmond Cyril Clarke, was elected on 10 November 1969.

The Society continued to attract able staff and to retain them in its service for long periods. Judged by the standards of many business firms, the number of employees was remarkably small in relation to the amount of work that had to be done both for the Society itself and for the large numbers of trusts which it administered, and this was achieved partly because the Society was a generous and considerate employer, and partly because its servants developed an intense loyalty and devotion to the organisation, very much as Mr. Lorry in *The Tale of Two Cities* was prepared to serve Telson's Bank in a way that could not be expected from a mere employee. When the Chief Clerk, T. E. Rea retired in 1914, he had served for 55 years in the Treasurer's Office.[56] He was succeeded in that position by George Erith who had first joined the staff in the later nineteenth century. By the end of 1914, his salary was £325, and it had been increased to £450 per annum by 1918. When he died in 1926, the Society made a gift of £300 to his widow.[57] Another assistant accountant in the office was Arthur J. Trump who retired in 1948 with an annuity of £300 per annum and a donation of 100 guineas after serving the Society for over 40 years.[58] J. T. Bell, who was appointed accountant in the Treasurer's Office in 1929, remained in the Society's service until his death in 1960. During his illness the previous year the Society had helped meet his medical expenses and had arranged to send him on holiday to Madeira during his convalescence.[59] His place was taken by Mr. K. H. Trigg who had first come into the Treasurer's Office in 1946 and who is still in its service.[60]

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[50] See p. 479.

[51] For an appreciation of W. W. Ward written by Miss G. E. Whitaker but not signed by her, see the *Western Daily Press*, 17 February 1932. His portrait by Maurice Greiffenhagen R.A. hangs in the present Hall.

[52] *H.B.32*, p. 194, 26 Feb. 1932. For an appreciation of his services by the Master, see *H.B.32*, pp. 210–12, 29 April 1932.

[53] *H.B.32*, pp. 197 ff., 18 March 1932.

[54] *H.B.32*, pp. 214 ff., 4 May 1932; p. 217, 27 May 1932. Col. Burges was at this time Governor of the Tower of London. He had originally been admitted in 1919. He became Master in 1936. He died while attending a meeting of the Standing Committee on 24 Oct. 1946.

[55] *H.B.33*, p. 365, 24 Oct. 1944. His portrait by Mr. Arnold Mason, A.R.A., was painted from photographs and hangs in the present Hall (*H.B.34*, p. 59, 25 July 1946; p. 99, 28 March 1947; p. 109, 30 May 1947).

The domestic staff of the Hall also provide a number of examples of long service and of the Society's concern for those in its employ. Miss Mary Muller, who was appointed housekeeper in 1902 at a salary of £80 a year, was receiving £175 a year by the time of her retirement in 1923 when she was given a pension of £100 a year,[61] and her successor, Mrs. E. A. Lucas, was still in the Society's service when she died in 1943.[62] In 1928 the porter T. Abbott resigned after 18 years' service and received a gratuity.[63] Sgt. Major Thomas Leat, D.C.M., who was taken on as porter at £2 10s. a week in 1928, resigned in 1947 and also received a pension.[64] The present porter and caretaker, Mr. A. E. Moon, first entered the Society's service in

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[56] See p. 267.

[57] *H.B.30*, p. 204, 18 Dec. 1914; p. 363, 22 Feb. 1918; *H.B.31*, p. 326, 29 Jan. 1926.

[58] In 1908, his salary was increased to £110 p.a. (*H.B.29*, p. 332, 27 Nov. 1908); *H.B.34*, p. 157, 27 Feb. 1948; p. 236, 16 Dec. 1948.

[59] *H.B.32*, p. 37, 22 Feb. 1929; *H.B.37*, p. 76, 24 April 1958; p. 84, 30 May 1958; p. 230, 28 Jan. 1960.

[60] *H.B.34*, p. 54, 28 June 1946; *H.B.37*, p. 230, 28 Jan. 1960.

[61] *H.B.29*, p. 13, 26 Sept. 1902; *H.B.31*, p. 181, 24 Nov. 1922. She was the daughter of Muller, the artist.

[62] *H.B.31*, p. 224, 21 Dec. 1923; *H.B.33*, p. 309, 26 March 1943.

[63] *H.B.32*, p. 3, 20 July 1928.

[64] *H.B.34*, p. 103, 24 April 1947. He died in 1958 (*H.B.37*, p. 130, 25 Jan. 1959).

1948.[65] When Mr. E. Radford died in 1956, he had acted as butler to the Society for twenty-eight years.[66]

Concern for the welfare of the staff was shown on numerous occasions. Thus, when Mrs. Bullock, the cook resigned in 1929 at the age of 78, it was decided to continue paying her wages for the rest of her life,[67] and when Mrs. Jones, a member of the kitchen staff retired in the same year she was given a pension.[68] In 1944, when Mrs. J. Luke, who had been cook to the Society for more than 12 years, was reported to have had a complete breakdown and to have lost her sight, the Treasurer was instructed to take steps to free her from financial worry,[69] and in 1957 when Miss L. Thomas who had been on the staff as a general maid for 22 years decided to retire she was given a gratuity and a pension of £3 a week for life.[70] The Hall Books contain many references to help given to members of staff and their dependants when they were faced with illness and heavy medical expenses.

The Society of Merchant Venturers has over the centuries secured the services and won the devotion of a number of able "servants", but among the most remarkable and outstanding of them all is Miss G. E. Whitaker who was taken on to the staff from 25 March 1918 by the acting Treasurer, H. Vincent Barnard. Members of the Society were used to women on the domestic staff, but a woman in the Treasurer's office was a different matter. It was no doubt considered by some to be an unhappy necessity occasioned by the War, for A. J. Trump had been called up for military service,[71] and young male accountants were not readily available. When W. W. Ward became Treasurer later in the year, he was somewhat taken aback to find a woman on his staff, all the more because, to the distress of the family, his own sister had been an active suffragette, but he was essentially fair-minded and reserved judgement, and, as Miss Whitaker remarks, "he soon fashioned me into a loyal and devoted admirer, intent on doing everything in the world to justify his growing confidence". The Chief Clerk, Mr. Erith, very quickly paid her the high compliment of giving her sole responsibility for keeping the accounts of the Colston charities, and in the course of thirty-nine years' service under three Treasurers she came to occupy a position of special importance in the Society's affairs. She was heavily involved in the work in connection with the establishment of the St. Monica Home of Rest,[72] and she became the friend and confidante of many of the Society's members. She could turn her hand to most tasks from accountancy to cooking. In the war years, she added to her many duties a special responsibility for air-raid precautions for the old people in the Merchants' Almshouse in whom she had a great personal interest.[73] She was quickly on the scene after the devastating air-raids on the Hall and Almshouse and played a major part in reassuring the almsfolk and in saving what could be salvaged from the wreckage, for the historic treasures of the Hall meant a great deal to her. She helped to establish the Society in temporary headquarters in the St. Monica Home of Rest, and after the war she was kept immensely busy with the task of making a splendid new home for the society in the Merchants' House.[74] The Society's records – many of them in her handwriting – and the comments of numerous senior members bear witness to her ability as an administrator, and her versatility was shown by the fact that both during and after the war she took on with great success the catering and general housekeeping arrangements for the Hall, including most of the public functions of the Society.[75] W. W. Ward once called her "the masterful one", and her ability, combined with the fact that she was a woman, meant that there were occasional conflicts with some members.[76] In 1948, it was the unanimous decision of the Hall that "the Society ought to recognise in some suitable manner the exceptional qualities which Miss Whitaker has shown, and her contribution – unique in the History of the Society – to its many Branches". Her portrait by A. R. Middleton Todd, R.A. was presented to her "in the expectation that eventually it shall take its place among the portraits of the Society's Officers in its Hall".[77] She resigned in March 1957,[78] and her portrait, apart from those of members of the royal family, is the only portrait of a woman in the Merchants' Hall.

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[65] *H.B.34*, p. 149, 29 Jan. 1948. He had been at The St. Monica Home of Rest since 1939.

[66] *H.B.36*, p. 206, 28 Sept. 1956. He was succeeded by Mr. J. Eveleigh who had retired from being Butler to the Lord Mayor. Mr. Kilkenny, the present Butler came into the service of the Society in 1959.

[67] *H.B.32*, p. 46, 26 April 1929.

[68] *H.B.32*, p. 54, 31 May 1929.

[69] *H.B.33*, p. 349, 27 April 1944.

[70] *H.B.36*, p. 262, 22 Feb. 1957.

[71] *H.B.30*, p. 363, 22 Feb. 1918.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Society's Clerk was Jere Osborne, who had first been appointed in 1873 and who continued to hold the office until his death in 1919.[79] His portrait, which had been painted at the request of the Society in 1916, hangs in the present Hall.[80] He was succeeded by one of his partners, M. H. G. Vassall, who held the office until his resignation in 1938[81] and the Society chose as his successor Mr. E. J. G. Higham who was next in seniority in Mr. Vassall's firm.[82] Mr. Higham wished to resign in 1946 but was asked to continue for six months with the assistance of another member of his firm, Mr. C. H. Kinnersley, who took over as Clerk at the end of April 1947.[83] He was a tower of strength in connection with the intricate legal problems when the Ministry of Health tried to take over the St. Monica Home of Rest after World War II. The extensive purchase of agricultural land in connection with the St. Monica's Charity in the post-war years[84] naturally involved the Clerk in a vast amount of legal business, and in 1948 the Society agreed a special scale of fees to be used in connection with this work and raised the Clerk's honorarium from £50 a year to £250 guineas.[85] Mr. C. H. Kinnersley resigned on 30 September 1968 and was succeeded by the present Clerk, Mr. S. J. D. Awdry.[86]

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[72] *H.B.31*, p. 252, 24 Oct. 1924. [73] *H.B.33*, p. 133, 27 April 1939.

[74] *H.B.35*, p. 358, 30 Oct. 1953.

[75] *H.B.33*, p. 338, 17 Dec. 1943; p. 383, 24 Nov. 1944; *H.B.34*, p. 14, 30 Nov. 1945; p. 354, 29 Feb. 1950.

[76] *H.B.32*, p. 349, 23 Dec. 1932; p. 258, 24 Feb. 1933.

[77] *H.B.34*, pp. 198, 199, 23 July 1948; p. 210, 28 Oct. 1948; p. 318, 28 Oct. 1949.

[78] *H.B.36*, p. 215, 25 Oct. 1956; p. 222, 26 Oct. 1956; p. 278, 22 March 1957.

[79] See pp. 267–8, 451 *supra*; *H.B.31*, p. 16, 19 Sept. 1919; p. 28, 25 Oct. 1919.

[80] *H.B.30*, p. 277, 29 Sept. 1916.

[81] *H.B.33*, p. 113, 10 Nov. 1938.

For managing its property in and around Bristol, the Society employs the services of a Surveyor, and it also has a Land Steward to look after the considerable agricultural estates for which it is responsible, particularly in connection with the St. Monica Home of Rest. The first man to undertake this challenging task when the Society embarked on large-scale purchase of land was Mr. P. E. Tyhurst. He had served in the trenches while still in his teens in the First World War and had later been a lecturer at Cirencester Agricultural College and Land Agent to the Bristol Waterworks Company. Sir Foster G. Robinson, who was largely responsible for the policy of investing in land, secured his services for the Society. For some twenty years up to his death in 1964, he devoted his remarkable energy and business ability to the service of the Merchant Venturers, whose traditions he came to love deeply, and his kindness and understanding won the devotion of the tenants on the great estates which he managed.[87]

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[82] *H.B.33*, p. 71, 17 Dec. 1937.

[83] *H.B.34*, p. 71, 24 Oct. 1946; p. 106, 25 April 1947.

[84] See pp. 517–8.

[85] *H.B.34*, p. 210, 28 Oct. 1948.

[86] *H.B.40*, p. 61, 25 July 1968.

[87] In 1919, the Surveyor, W. S. Paul, retired after nearly 40 years service. He was followed by Mr. R. C. James and in 1947 by Mr. W. S. Goodbody, who died suddenly in 1962 (*H.B.30*, p. 308, 21 Dec. 1917; p. 350, 25 Jan. 1918; *H.B.34*, p. 126, 30 Oct. 1947; *H.B.38*, p. 133, 25 May 1962). Mr. Goodbody was succeeded by the present Surveyor, Mr. C. D. Franklin. In 1964, the Master reported the death of the Land Steward, Mr. P. E. Tyhurst, who had served the Society for 20 years and who had been heavily involved in the purchase of estates after World War II (*H.B.39*, p. 1, 11 Sept. 1964). A printed copy of the Address given by the Master, Mr. J. Britton, at Mr. Tyhurst's Memorial Service in Bristol Cathedral on 12 Sept. 1964, is preserved in the Society's archives. Mr. Tyhurst was succeeded by the present Land Steward, Mr. H. O. C. Carter-Jonas.

In the first forty years of the twentieth century, the Society continued to conduct its business in the Hall in King Street on the site it had owned since the mid-sixteenth century. From time to time, relatively large sums had to be spent on the maintenance and decoration of what was basically an eighteenth-century building. In 1907, for example, it was found that the joists of the floors of the Banqueting Hall and the Reception Room were rotten, and about £900 was spent on new oak floors with steel girders.[88] In 1920, an estimate of £915 was accepted for a new roof,[89] and six years later, work on the balustrade outside the Hall was estimated to cost about £350.[90] In the nineteen-thirties, the last decade of the Hall's existence, there was considerable expenditure. In 1931, for example, £542 was spent on the King Street exterior; £363 on making a strong room for books at the north-west end of the Marine Room; £100 on a urinal; £297 on a Lady's Cloakroom, and £41 on a women servants' cloakroom.[91] The next year, a tender of £1,260 was accepted for restoring the Marsh Street frontage, £195 for carving work and £132 for supporters on the piers to the main entrance gate.[92] Decorations to the Banqueting Hall and Withdrawing Room cost over £1,000 in 1934,[93] and next year the estimate for work on the Reception Room and vestibule amounted to £1,425.[94]

It was also necessary to adapt the Hall to the needs of the modern world. A sub-committee looked into the matter of ventilation and lighting in 1903 and considered, among other things, whether "the chandeliers could, without injury or undue risk, be adapted for electric lighting purposes". Its recommendations resulted in the installation of electric light throughout the Hall.[95] In 1932, an intercommunication telephone system was installed at a cost of £16 5s.[96] and in 1936 a refrigerator was bought for £73.[97]

There were continual additions to the treasures which had been accumulated over the centuries as a result of gifts and of purchases, by the Society. Only a few of these can be noted. In 1909, for example, Miss Tyndall presented two drawings of the eighteenth-century privateers the *Duke* and *Duchess of Bedford*;[98] in 1916 William D. Fripp gave the Society a relic of Edward Colston and a portion of the brass ornaments taken from the coffin at All Saints;[99] in 1922 George A. Wills presented a standing cup in honour of the Prince of Wales' visit,[100] and in 1929 the London Armourers and Brasiers Company gave a beautiful silver cup.[101] In the same year Claude B. Fry donated a Chippendale grandfather clock reputed to have been in the possession of Captain Cook when he circumnavigated the world.[102] In 1926, an Art sub-Committee was set up, and this gave advice on the decoration of the Hall and had a small annual grant for making purchases.[103] In 1929, for example, it spent £80 on 10 prints of Bristol by Nicholas Pocock,[104] and 100 guineas was spent next year at the sale of the books of the late Alderman F. F. Fox.[105] In the nineteen-thirties, Victoriana was out of fashion, and it was presumably for this reason that it recommended the disposal of the copies of Winterhalter's portraits of Victoria and Albert, which the Society had been at such pains to acquire in the nineteenth century.[106]

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[88] *H.B.29*, p. 232, 25 Jan. 1907; p. 237, 4 Feb. 1907; p. 238, 22 Feb. 1907; p. 249, 22 March 1907. It was fortunate that the Treasurer, Percy Liston King, had been in the timber trade.

[89] *H.B.31*, p. 66, 25 June 1920.

[90] *H.B.31*, p. 346, 25 June 1926.

[91] *H.B.32*, p. 131, 29 Jan. 1931; p. 145, 30 April 1931; p. 154, 29 May 1931.

[92] *H.B.32*, p. 207, 28 April 1932; p. 222, 17 June 1932.

[93] *H.B.32*, p. 304, 25 Jan. 1934; p. 315, 22 March 1934.

[94] *H.B.32*, p. 365, 2 May 1935.

[95] *H.B.29*, p. 35, 27 Feb. 1903; p. 40, 27 March 1903; pp. 52, 53, 54, 24 July 1903; p. 59, 25 July 1903.

[96] *H.B.32*, p. 231, 30 Sept. 1932.

[97] *H.B.33*, p. 5, 29 May 1936.

The Society also showed from time to time interest in its own history and concern for the preservation of its records. In 1901, it purchased 100 copies of Latimer's history of the Society,[107] and in 1918 it set up a sub-committee to look into the books, papers and records of the Society and to advise how best they could be brought to the knowledge of the members of the Hall.[108] In 1922, it decided to print Mr. C. Cyril Clarke's lecture dealing with the history of the Society,[109] and in 1931, Professor Mowat of the University of Bristol was asked to write a continuation of Latimer's history of the Merchant Venturers, which had been published in 1903.[110] In the same year a new strong room was made for storage of the Society's books and plate.[111]

As the danger of war came nearer in 1939, the Society naturally took what steps it could to protect the Hall and almshouse against air-raids. In January Professor J. F. Baker advised it to provide wooden shutters for the cellars as a protection against gas and to acquire sand and appliances to deal with incendiary bombs.[112] In

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[98] *H.B.29*, p. 362, 28 May 1909.

[99] *H.B.30*, p. 291, 22 Dec. 1916.

[100] *H.B.31*, p. 138, 27 Jan. 1922.

[101] *H.B.32*, p. 37, 22 Feb. 1929.

[102] *H.B.32*, p. 41, 22 March 1929.

[103] *H.B.31*, p. 370, 17 Dec. 1926.

[104] *H.B.32*, p. 34, 25 Jan. 1929.

[105] *H.B.32*, p. 93, 28 Feb. 1930.

[106] *H.B.32*, p. 354, 24 Jan. 1935. The portraits were presented to Colston's Boys School but were returned to the Society in 1958 and now hang in the Hall (*H.B. 32*, p. 369, 31 May 1935; *H.B.37*, p. 98, 24 July 1958).

[107] *H.B.28*, p. 436, 20 Dec. 1901.

[108] *H.B.30*, p. 365, 22 March 1918.

[109] *H.B.31*, p. 138, 27 Jan. 1922.

[110] *H.B.32*, p. 169, 25 Sept. 1931. This is in typescript in the Society's archives, but it was not published.

[111] *H.B.32*, p. 131, 29 Jan. 1931.

[112] *H.B.33*, p. 119, 25 Jan. 1939.

April, the Treasurer reported to the Standing Committee that the male staff of the Hall had completed a fire-fighting course, that two sets of the equipment officially recommended had been purchased, that his secretary, Miss Whitaker, had nearly completed an anti-gas course, to be followed by a first-aid course. She would be responsible for the almshouse and immediate neighbourhood. Two kitchens in the Hall had been made gas-proof for the use of the almsfolk and hall staff, and 10 tons of sand and 400 sandbags had been bought for protecting the windows. Easy access would be provided for the almsfolk.[113] War came on 3 September 1939, and the Hall made emergency regulations relating to its meetings and authorised the First Assistant, Mr. H. Sommerville Gunn, to act during the absence of the Master on government service.[114] The task of storing the Hall valuables and the sandbagging and equipping the Refuge Rooms had already been completed by the staff in the fortnight before the outbreak of war, largely out of office hours.[115] Bristol was at this time considered to be a relatively safe area, but as a precaution wooden cases were made in which the chandeliers could be packed and stored away within 48 hours,[116] and by the end of May the Treasurer reported that they had been dismantled and stored.[117] Permission was given to neighbouring firms to erect an air-raid shelter in the Hall garden.

The first air-raid affecting the Hall and Almshouse was on the night of Monday 2 December 1940. Extensive damage was done to the Hall by high explosives, and the Almshouse suffered from blast and flying debris. The roadways were strewn with broken glass and fallen masonry, and no one was allowed into the city, but Miss Whitaker, who had been on duty that night as Warden in her own home area, managed to persuade a doctor friend to drive her to the scene, and his car bearing the word "Doctor" was allowed through. The main entrance, the reception room and the vestibule were a heap of rubble and twisted wires, but she climed over the blocks of masonry and rubble and did what she could to comfort the old people in the air-raid shelters under the Hall. The bomb had gone right through the vestibule to the strong room at the end of the Marine Room. The strong room contained the silver, plate and archives, including the charters. Next morning, it was necessary to get an acetelyne welder to burn through the twisted steel door and grill to the strong room, and for some days after that the work went on of removing everything that was left from the wreck. On 8 December, the Treasurer reported to a meeting of the Standing Committee held at Goldney House, Clifton, on the steps taken to deal with the situation. He had retained two rooms in the Nurses' Home, St. Monica's, for the conduct of business for the time being. With cooperation of the Town Clerk and the City Archivist, Miss E. Ralph, the most important records, the Masters' Jewel and the Dulverton salvers had been stored in the tunnel of the old Port and Pier Railway, Hotwells. The plate had been put in a strong room in Barclay's Bank, Corn Street; the deeds of the property and estates were in the strong room of Barclay's Bank, Henleaze Road, and by the kindness of Mr. Charles S. Clarke, some of the antique tables and chairs of the Society's had been taken to Tracy Park, Wick. Negotiations were going on for the acquisition of part of Butleigh Court, near Glastonbury, for storing furniture, secondary archives and modern records. The Standing Committee decided to make every effort to preserve the Hall and the Surveyor was asked to take the necessary steps to have recognised first-aid repairs carried out.[118]

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[113] *H.B.33*, p. 133, 27 April 1939.

[114] *H.B.33*, p. 149, 14 Sept. 1939.

[115] *H.B.33*, p. 168, 24 Nov. 1939.

[116] *H.B.33*, p. 179, 24 Feb. 1940.

[117] *H.B.33*, p. 193, 31 May 1940; p. 196, 28 June 1940.

The Surveyor's report on the damage resulting from the air-raid showed that about half the Marsh Street frontage of the Hall was unsafe and would have to be pulled down, that the ground floor general office would require demolition, that the Reception Room and vestibule had practically disappeared, that the Treasurer's Room, the Housekeeper's Room and the Committee Room were so badly damaged that they would also have to be demolished, but that it might be possible to save the Withdrawing Room and the Banqueting Room. The kitchen and sculleries had suffered only slight damage, and the cellars, which housed the Society's very valuable store of wine, had only a few cracks.[119]

The Hall was hit again on 16 March 1941, and the Surveyor reported that it now seemed impossible to save the remaining part of the structure. He was asked to arrange for the removal and protection of the carvings, doors, coat of arms, and mantelpieces and anything which could be saved, and the Treasurer was instructed to make arrangements for the removal and safe-keeping of the wine.[120] The coat of arms which had been fixed over the fireplace in the Banqueting Hall had been scattered all over the room and most of the pieces had been laboriously assembled by Miss Whitaker and Mr. E. W. F. Barwick, foreman of the contractors John Perkins and Sons. With the help of the Society's housemaid, Miss L. E. Thomas and the butler, Mr. Radford, they also packed away hundreds of pieces of china and porcelain, glass and other equipment. A lot of

[118] *H.B.33*, p. 217, 8 Dec. 1940. I am indebted to Miss G. E. Whitaker for a first-hand account of the effects of the raid. The Master, E. F. Eberle, visited the scene on the Monday morning, and his notes on what he saw are among the Society's archives. On 29 Jan. 1941 the Treasurer reported that the furniture and other effects were now stored in Butleigh Court.

[119] *H.B.33*, pp. 220 ff., 20 Dec. 1940.

[120] *H.B.33*, p. 232, 28 March 1941.

the cutlery had already disappeared, possibly as a result of looting.[121]

There was further damage to the Hall on 14 May 1941 and there was also serious damage to the Almshouse.[122] The war-damage claim for furniture, pictures and chattels lost as a result of enemy action was finally settled at £3,552 18s. 11d.[123] The Hall had been damaged beyond hope of repair, and until a decision could be made about the future, the Society continued to conduct its business in the accommodation made available to it by the Council of the St. Monica Home of Rest.

The question of what was to be done in the future was influenced to some extent by the fact that the City was anxious to acquire part of the site of the Hall and the Almshouse for road-widening and for making a roundabout. This matter had in fact been raised by the City before the war, but no action had been taken.[124] In July 1941, the City Engineer informed the Treasurer that part of the site would probably be required and asked whether the Society intended to rebuild the Hall on its old site. At that stage, the Society thought it probably would want to rebuild, but it was willing to negotiate over the land required by the City.[125] As a result of the negotiations, the Society eventually agreed to sell the Corporation 604 square yards of its own land for £9,060 and 76 square yards of the almshouse land for £1,140.[126] Although the Society had lost part of its site in this way, it decided to give itself more room if it wished to rebuild in the future by buying from Messrs. McArthur & Co. their site and buildings in Marsh Street adjoining the Hall for £15,000.[127]

When the war ended, the Society decided to look for a temporary home pending a final decision about rebuilding, and it purchased for £4,250 Fern House, Clifton Down, for use as a temporary Hall which was to be known as the Merchants' House. Licences and planning permission were obtained for repairs costing £875, and the temporary hall was occupied from 1 November 1945.[128]

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[121] Again, I am indebted to Miss Whitaker for these details. The wine was stored partly in St. Monica's, partly in Mr. C. S. Clarke's cellars at Tracy Park and partly in the cellars of Mr. Alfred Robinson at Backwell (*H.B.33*, f. 233, 23 April 1941). The salvaged coat of arms is now preserved in the new Merchants' Hall.

[122] *H.B.33*, pp. 237, 238, 30 May 1941.

[123] *H.B.33*, p. 276, 26 June 1942.

[124] *H.B.32*, p. 417, 30 April 1936.

[125] *H.B.33*, p. 242, 23 July 1941; p. 246, 26 Sept. 1941.

[126] *H.B.33*, pp. 261 ff., 28 Jan. 1942; p. 269, 27 March 1942; p. 278, 29 July 1942; p. 284, 25 Sept. 1942; p. 286, 28 Oct. 1942; p. 299, 27 Jan. 1943; p. 308, 26 March 1943; p. 311, 28 April 1943; p. 327, 28 Oct. 1943; p. 335, 26 Nov. 1943.

[127] *H.B.33*, p. 363, 29 Sept. 1944; p. 370, 27 Oct. 1944; p. 386, 29 Dec. 1944. McArthurs were to complete the contract five years after the end of the war unless they acquired other accommodation earlier.

[128] *H.B.33*, p. 408, 25 May 1945; p. 410, 29 June 1945; p. 414, 26 July 1945; *H.B.34*, p. 4, 25 Oct. 1945.

A further complication then arose because the City was anxious to obtain by compulsory purchase the site of the Hall and the adjoining property which the Society had contracted to buy from McArthur & Co. The Society objected to the compulsory purchase order, and as a result of a public enquiry in June 1946, the Ministry exempted the Society's property from the order.[129]

Owing to a number of complicating problems, it was some years before the Society made its final decision as to whether or not to rebuild the Hall on its old site in the centre of Bristol. Meanwhile, it let the Hall wall for advertising, with a provision that no advertisement for patent medicines was to be displayed.[130] In 1948, it let the site for a time to the Pullman Road Refreshment Car Company with permission to station a Pullman refreshment car there, provided the lay-out was attractive,[131] and two years later the Treasurer was asked to arrange with the advertising agency to discontinue an advertisement for Nicholson's gin and replace it with one for Wrigley's chewing gum.[132]

As late as January 1950, the Society expressed its intention of retaining the site of the old Hall in the hope of possible rebuilding,[133] but it had in some degree at least prejudged the issue by acquiring in January 1949 for £9,200 Auckland House, Clifton Down, which adjoined the Merchants' House.[134] Plans were immediately made to convert the drawing-rooms of the two houses into one room, and the work was completed by the end of September at a cost of £850.[135] In December 1949, plans were approved for making the Committee Room at the back large enough for the whole Hall at a cost of £300 and in 1951 approval was given to plans for making one big reception room at the back of the two houses.[136]

Meanwhile, negotiations were going on with the War Damage Commissioners over the question of compensation. There was a possibility of either recovering "the cost of work" if the Hall were rebuilt, or of accepting a "value payment" if it were not. There was also a possibility that the site value would be increased if the site of the Merchants' Almshouse could be included along with that of the Hall.[137] There was uncertainty about how "the value" would be calculated by the Commissioners who at one stage worked on the wrong basis and put "the value" at £70,000. After lengthy negotiations and some hard bargaining, the Commissioners agreed to a payment of £32,600, and by December 1955 the money had been paid to the Society.[138] A Hall at which 25 members were present had already agreed in October 1955 that the Merchants' House should be the permanent home of the Society. Although the former Hall had been in the ownership of the Society for four hundred years, the question of disposal of the site was to be decided not on sentiment but on what was most financially advantageous. The Standing Committee was to consider what should be done.[139]

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[129] *H.B.34*, p. 38, 29 March 1946; p. 49, 31 May 1946; p. 56, 28 June 1946; p. 91, 30 Jan. 1947.

[130] *H.B.34*, p. 49, 31 May 1946.

[131] *H.B.34*, p. 205, 23 Sept. 1948.

[132] *H.B.34*, p. 355, 24 Feb. 1950.

[133] *H.B.34*, p. 352, 27 Jan. 1950.

[134] Auckland House was first offered to the Society by one of its members, Mr. J. H. Perks, in April 1948 but there were long and embarrassing negotiations over the price (*H.B.34*, p. 168, 29 April 1948; p. 174, 30 April 1948; p. 184, 25 June 1948; p. 213, 28 Oct. 1948; pp. 228, 229, 25 Nov. 1948; p. 239, 16 Dec. 1948; p. 248, 27 Jan. 1949).

[135] *H.B.34*, p. 258, 25 Feb. 1949; p. 285, 27 May 1949; pp. 306, 307, 30 Sept. 1949.

[136] *H.B.34*, p. 338, 16 Dec. 1949; p. 345, 26 Jan. 1950; *H.B.35*, pp. 57, 58, 23 Feb. 1951.

It was, of course, a matter of great regret to some members that the Society did not rebuild the Hall on the site in the heart of Bristol which it had occupied from its foundation, but those who argued that financial considerations should overrule sentiment undoubtedly had a case, for there would have been many problems if it had been decided to rebuild.

Plans for development of the site were now considered and eventually in February 1957 the Hall agreed to dispose of it to the Northern Assurance Company for £17,200.[140]

Meanwhile, work had continued in order to make Auckland House and Fern House into the new Merchants' Hall. Licence was obtained early in 1953 for removing the dividing wall between the two buildings and providing a new central staircase and landing at a cost of over £5,000,[141] and later in the year major reconstruction, heating and decoration, including a new Committee Room, Strong Room and Ladies' Cloakroom, cost nearly £15,000.[142] In 1959, there was discussion about enlarging the Banqueting Hall. The old Hall could seat 84 guests at the annual banquet and up to 120 on Charter Day, but the present one would take only 60. There were plans to spend up to £20,000 on alterations, but these were modified

[137] For the Almshouse, see pp. 552–4.

[138] For these long-drawn-out negotiations, see *H.B.34*, p. 390, 23 June 1950; *H.B.35*, pp. 31 ff., 24 Nov. 1950; p. 52, 26 Jan. 1951; p. 56, 23 Feb. 1951; p. 72, 26 April 1951; pp. 219, 220, 24 July 1952; p. 282, 29 Jan. 1953; pp. 319, 320, 26 June 1953; p. 327, 23 July 1953; p. 332, 24 July 1953; *H.B.36*, p. 29, 28 Oct. 1954; pp. 115 ff., 30 Sept. 1955; p. 123, 27 Oct. 1955; pp. 126 ff., 28 Oct. 1955; p. 144, 16 Dec. 1955.

[139] *H.B.36*, 126 ff., 28 Oct. 1955.

[140] *H.B.36*, p. 146, 16 Dec. 1955; p. 210, 28 Sept. 1956; p. 234, 30 Nov. 1956; pp. 243, 244, 14 Dec. 1956; p. 258, 25 Jan. 1957; pp. 271, 272, 22 Feb. 1957.

[141] *H.B.35*, p. 275, 29 Jan. 1953; p. 292, 27 Feb. 1953; pp. 304, 305, 23 April 1953.

[142] *H.B.35* p. 344, 29 Oct. 1953; p. 364, 30 Oct. 1953.

by the Finance Committee and less extensive changes were made costing about £11,000.[143] In 1963, it was necessary to repair the roof and defective stonework at a cost of over £5,000,[144] and decorations and repairs at the end of 1964 amounted to over £1,500. Dry rot was discovered on the first floor in 1967, and the estimate for dealing with this was approximately £1,500.[145] In addition to these large items, it has been necessary to expend a considerable amount more in decorations and repairs, but the result has been the creation of a remarkably interesting building to replace the historic Hall destroyed in World War II. It is important to note that the Hall is not a club used by members but an office for the administration of very large charitable funds for which the Society is trustee and a place for preserving the Society's records and the priceless treasures of historic interest which it has acquired over the centuries. The annual banquet and the Charter Day meetings and celebrations are the aspects of the Society which tend to attract public attention, but the day-to-day work of the Treasurer and his staff, the twice monthly meeting of the Standing Committee and the quarterly meetings of the whole Hall are of much greater significance.

The Hall has continued to receive gifts from its members. These include a saddle cloth and trappings used by Queen Elizabeth I during her visit to Bristol in 1574, presented in 1946 by Mr. F. G. Robinson,[146] and a photograph of Winston Churchill in the uniform of the 4th Hussars autographed with the words "From the Special Correspondent of the Morning Post, Nile Expeditionary Force 1898" presented by the late Hon. W. R. S. Bathurst.[147]

The Society's splendid collection of records has through the centuries not always received the attention it deserves, and until the years after World War II there was a certain hesitation about making it readily available to those engaged in historical research. In 1958, the charters, ordinances and other records which had been stored in the City repository in the tunnel under Clifton Down were brought back to the new Hall,[148] and in the years that followed steps were taken to provide adequate storage space and to display some of the documents.[149] In 1969, as a result of a report from the late Mr. R. H. Brown on the classification of the Society's books and the preservation of its records, it was decided to give special attention to the collection of Bristoliana and to microfilm the Hall Books.[150] The records are now in process of being classified and catalogued by a professional archivist, Miss Elizabeth Ralph.[151]

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[143] *H.B.37*, p. 147, 15 April 1959; p. 169, 26 June 1959; p. 175, 16 July 1959; p. 181, 23 July 1957; p. 203, 29 Oct. 1959.

[144] *H.B.38*, p. 191, 29 March 1963; p. 193, 5 April 1963; p. 263, 30 Jan. 1964.

[145] *H.B.40*, p. 5, 29 Sept. 1967; p. 15, 24 Nov. 1967; p. 19, 29 Dec. 1967; p. 29, 23 Feb. 1968.

[146] *H.B.34*, p. 87, 20 Dec. 1946.

[147] *H.B.39*, p. 127, 25 Feb. 1966.

[148] *H.B.37*, p. 101, 25 July 1958.

[149] *H.B.37*, pp. 118, 119, 28 Nov. 1958; p. 123, 19 Dec. 1958; p. 133, 30 Jan. 1959; p. 139, 27 Feb. 1959; p. 230, 28 Jan. 1960.

For a number of reasons, it is not possible here to make a detailed examination of the finances of the Society and of the various trust funds which it administers in the twentieth century, and that task must be left to a future historian. Nevertheless, one or two general comments can be made.

Obviously, the most dramatic development in the twentieth century was the acceptance by the Society in 1922 of the trusteeship for the St. Monica Home of Rest established by Henry Herbert Wills.[152] In addition to the property on which the Home was to be built, the Society became responsible for the management of the endowments which were in the form of shares with a nominal value of over £1,250,000. This was a trust on a scale which vastly exceeded anything which the Society had handled before, and in the next fifty years the management of the trust and the investment of its resources has been a major concern. After World War II, a considerable proportion of the resources were invested in agricultural estates, but large sums were invested in shares, and this involved continual review of the stock market to obtain the best return for the charity. In 1967, the total amount invested by the Society in shares for its various charitable trusts and for its own corporate funds was estimated to be worth over £2,750,000,[153] and the capital value of the trust funds was probably somewhere between £7,000,000 and £9,000,000.

The Society's own corporate funds are kept quite separate from the very large charitable trusts which it manages. The Society has in the course of the century made a number of considerable capital gains by disposing of some of its property in Bristol and elsewhere. It has invested on occasions in agricultural land near Bristol and in building development in Redland and Stapleton, and it holds a considerable sum in various kinds of shares.[154] Both its capital and its income have increased considerably since 1900, but so also have its expenses, and a high proportion of its income is devoted to educational and charitable activities of all kinds. It is not a wealthy corporation, and the belief that it is very rich arises very lagely from the fact that it holds great sums in trust for various charities.

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[150] *H.B.40*, pp. 126 ff., 9 May 1969.

[151] I should like to express my gratitude to Dr. Helen Mellor who made a classified list of the records when I first undertook this work.

[152] See pp. 513–9.

[153] *Report of Investment Sub-Committee*, 20 Nov. 1967.

[154] See pp. 469–71.

CHAPTER 24

The Society and its Property in the Twentieth Century

THE Society continued to be concerned with property both in its own right and as a trustee for numerous charities, and, as has been noted elsewhere, in the course of the twentieth century it became responsible for purchasing and managing extensive landed estates on a very much larger scale than ever before in its history.[1] Its own property was mainly, although not exclusively, in the City of Bristol. It is not possible here to examine in detail all that this involved, but some aspects can be considered.

The Society was able to exercise a measure of control over planning and development in relation to land and buildings for which it was ground landlord and on which it had placed restrictive covenants. Structural alterations such as putting in dormer windows or making additions to existing buildings had to receive its approval, as did changes of use, such as converting private houses into flats, hotels or business premises. When considering applications, the Society normally took into account the views of the owners of adjoining property and the effect on the district as a whole. Permission to carry out improvements was often subject to an increase in ground rent. A few illustrations can be given from the many to be found in the Hall Books. When in 1903 Dr. Elliott of 3, Beaufort Road built a pantry at the back of his house, his neighbour, the Rev. A. C. Macpherson, objected. The Society dealt with the difficulty by telling Dr. Elliott to put up a trellis with climbing creeper.[2] The following year, the residents of Richmond Hill complained that Messrs. Newbery and Spindler were carrying on their upholstery business at No. 5 to the annoyance of others. The Society took counsel's opinion, which was that this was a breach of covenant, and Newbery and Spindler agreed to stop the business and vacate the premises.[3] Four years later, the Docks Committee was considering making the Foreign Cattle Lairs, which it leased from the Society, into a public abattoir, but the Society refused to allow it to do so.[4] When the owner of 2, Oakfield Road wanted to convert the house into flats, he was required to pay a ground rent of £40 instead of £35 and to meet the legal costs.[5] In 1920, it was reported to the Society that there was a proposal to instal a cinema in the Spa Hotel. The Treasurer was instructed to make enquiries and, if necessary, to tell the owners that they needed the Society's consent.[6] When a request was received in 1953 that 26, Victoria Square might be turned into a private hotel, permission was granted on condition that no unsuitable signs were put up and that the lessee would agree to waive the Society's obligation under the lease to upkeep Victoria Square Garden.[7]

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[1] See pp. 517–8.

[2] *H.B.29*, p. 48, 26 June 1903.

[3] *H.B.29*, p. 101, 15 July 1904; p. 121, 23 Sept. 1904.

[4] *H.B.29*, p. 314, 24 July 1908.

The coming of the motor car and wireless created some problems. As early as 1909, a tenant of 8 York Buildings complained about being disturbed late at night by drivers of motor cars employed by the Tramway Company, which occupied some stables owned by the Society. The Tramway Company was asked to deal with the complaint.[8] In 1920, Dr. Lansdown of 39, Oakfield Road asked permission to erect "a Motor House" in his back garden. He was allowed to do so, provided the owners of the adjoining houses did not object.[9] There were many similar applications in the following years, and permission was usually given provided the neighbours did not object and provided the garage was for the use of the occupant. On the other hand, when the Mother Superior of the Convent in 5, Litfield Place asked to be allowed to erect a garage at the back "for Trade purposes", consent was refused.[10] Nor was there much sympathy initially for those who wanted to put up elaborate wireless aerials. In 1925, the Hall Book records "An application from Mr. Teasdale of 32, Richmond Terrace for permission to attach a wire in connection with his wireless installation to a tree in the Pleasure Ground." He was not allowed to do so.[11] Generally speaking, the Society wanted to keep up the tone of the neighbourhood. Thus, when the lessee of 28, Victoria Square put up "an objectionable advertisement Board", he was told to remove it.[12]

Fluctuations in the economy in the twentieth century and changes in the relative values of urban and agricultural land have naturally had their effect on the Society's policy. After World War I, for example, the Hall disposed of the estates in Somerset which it held either as trustee for the Colston Charity or in its own right,[13] and it also sold some of its property in Hotwells.[14] A considerable part of the proceeds of the Somerset sales was put into government stock.[15] Agricultural land was not an attractive investment between the wars, but just before World War II the Society decided to make a modest investment by buying a farm of 89 acres known as Bromley Farm at Stanton Drew in North Somerset.[16] After World War II, it put a very considerable proportion of the capital of the St. Monica Home into agricultural estates,[17] but in recent years it sold some of the estates and invested the proceeds in urban property.[18]

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[5] *H.B.30*, p. 404, 29 Nov. 1918.

[6] *H.B.31*, p. 44, 30 Jan. 1920.

[7] *H.B.35*, p. 339, 25 Sept. 1953. See p. 341.

[8] *H.B.29*, p. 364, 18 June 1909.

[9] *H.B.31*, p. 54, 26 March 1920.

[10] *H.B.31*, p. 211, 28 Sept. 1923.

[11] *H.B.31*, p. 282, 3 March 1925; see also *H.B.31*, p. 305, 25 Sept. 1925.

[12] *H.B.31*, p. 339, 30 April 1926. There are other examples in the *Hall Books*.

[13] *H.B.30*, p. 431, 25 April 1919; *H.B.31*, p. 7, 27 June 1919; p. 9, 25 July 1919; p. 18, 19 Sept. 1919; p. 22, 17 Oct. 1919; p. 37, 28 Nov. 1919.

On a number of occasions, it disposed of property in order to meet the needs of the city planners. Thus, in 1948 it agreed to sell to the Corporation over an acre of land known as Mead Close, Clifton Vale, which the City wanted to preserve as an open space;[19] in 1951, when the Corporation was engaged in slum clearance and redevelopment in Jacob's Wells Road, the Society sold its ground rents of £107 a year arising from Bristol Industrial Dwellings;[20] in 1953, it agreed to sell the Corporation 1, 2 and 3 Somerset Cottages for £2,290;[21] and ten years later, in connection with the Cumberland Basin development, the Corporation bought for £3,000 land which it had leased from the Society since 1853[22] There were, too, other sales to private developers. In 1961, for example, the block of flats known as Clifton Heights was built on Park Place from which the Society was receiving £300 per annum fee farm rent,[23] and next year Maple's furniture shop was built on land from which the Society received ground rents of £300.[24]

The Society had in the nineteenth century created a very large number of ground rents, and these had seemed at the time a very satisfactory investment, but a fixed return of this kind was not nearly so attractive in periods of rising prices, and in the early nineteen-sixties, the Society was very willing to dispose of ground rents at eighteen to twenty years' purchase. Ground rents worth £1,465 in Hotwells were sold in 1962.[25] By 1966, the Society was prepared to sell all its ground rents by auction and was willing to accept 10½ to 12 years' purchase. The next year, it disposed of ground rents worth £4,200 per annum for £39,500 to Bristol Corporation Superannuation Fund.[26]

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[14] *H.B.31*, pp. 7 ff., 27 June 1919. The sale of some of its property in St. Vincent's Place, the Colonnade, Brunswick Place, Charles Place and Elliott's Buildings realised c. £2,500.

[15] *H.B.31*, p. 12, 25 July 1919 reports the investment of £50,000 on behalf of the Charity and £28,000 on behalf of the Society.

[16] *H.B.33*, p. 144, 19 July 1939.

[17] See pp. 517–8.

[18] See p. 518.

[19] *H.B.34*, p. 185, 25 June 1948. It was agreed that 60 per cent of the purchase price of £1,350 should go to the Society and 40 per cent to the lessee.

[20] *H.B.35*, p. 111, 28 Sept. 1951; p. 146, 21 Dec. 1951.

[21] *H.B.35*, p. 205, 27 June 1953.

[22] *H.B.38*, p. 189, 29 March 1963.

[23] *H.B.38*, p. 8, 25 Nov. 1960.

[24] *H.B.38*, p. 35, 30 March 1961.

[25] *H.B.38*, p. 80, 20 Oct. 1961; p. 153, 25 Oct. 1962.

Like other property-owners, the Society was faced with the problem of rising costs of maintenance and the difficulty of increasing rents to meet them, particularly when it was responsible for upkeep and repairs. To take but one example, in 1951 the Surveyor reported that Prince's Buildings, Clifton, were in a bad state and that to do even the essential work would absorb the whole of the rents. On the other hand, the Hall felt that "the existence of these buildings in a bad state of repair did not enhance the Society's reputation as landlord". It was eventually decided to re-render the whole of the outside at a cost of £2,186 18s., but there were difficulties about increasing rents, particularly as some of the lessees were old people. Distressing letters were received from some of them, and the Society did what it could to give sympathetic treatment to those who were the victims of economic change.[27] A problem of a rather different kind arose in connection with the landlord's obligation for the upkeep of Victoria Square Garden, but this will be considered later.[28]

On a number of occasions, the Society continued the policy of developing its land by granting building leases and creating ground rents. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it dealt in this way with the old Bonding Yard at Hotwells, and Oldfield Terrace, Christina Terrace, Sandford Road and Britannia Buildings were built on the land.[29]

Another development was in Stapleton on land which the Society had purchased in its own right in the nineteenth century at the same time as the Colston Trust had acquired land for the new school.[30] As early as 1906, Mr. Paul, the Surveyor, had been instructed to prepare a scheme for development, but nothing came of this, and the land continued to be let for agricultural purposes or for the use of the school.[31] In 1917, Bristol Corporation tried unsuccessfully to acquire some of the land for artisans' dwellings,[32] and next year it took part of it, which was intended for the future use of the school, for allotments.[33] In 1934, the Society decided to develop the land still used as allotments, and in the following years building leases were granted and ground rents created on a considerable part of the property. Welsford Road and Welsford Avenue, Stapleton, were named after William Welsford Ward; Averay Road after Averay N. Jones, a Senior Commoner; Croft Road after Richard Croft Jones, the Society's Surveyor, and Rowland Avenue after Charles Rowland, managing director of Stone's the builders.[34] *The Merchants' Arms* was formally opened on 30 May 1938.[35] The Stapleton site had not been fully developed when war came, and at the end of the war part of it was leased to the Corporation for temporary houses.[36] Development was resumed by the Society and by Stone's in 1947 and it went on until 1953.[37]

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[26] *H.B.39*, p. 142, 27 May 1966; p. 146, 24 June 1966; p. 158, 30 Sept. 1966; p. 188, 24 Feb. 1967; p. 202, 26 May 1967; *H.B.40*, p. 2, 25 August 1967; p. 5, 29 Sept. 1967.

[27] *H.B.35*, p. 118, 25 Oct. 1951; pp. 139 ff., pp. 174, 181, 28 March 1952; p. 192, 24 April 1952.

[28] See pp. 572–4.

[29] *H.B.29*, p. 47, 22 May 1903; p. 129, 31 March 1905; p. 152, 29 Sept. 1905; p. 172, 22 Dec. 1905; p. 184, 30 March 1906; and numerous other entries in the *Hall Books*

[30] See p. 371.

[31] *H.B.29*, p. 201, 27 July 1906; p. 238, 22 Feb. 1907.

[32] *H.B.30*, p. 331, 26 Oct. 1917.

Another development was in Redland Green. This was carried out not for the Society itself but for the Colston Trust. In 1919, the Board of Education had approved the purchase for £6,500 of 33 acres bounded by Cranbrook Road, Cairns Road, Redland Court Road and Redland Green, including farm buildings on part of the estate.[38] In 1927, the Surveyor was instructed to prepare a layout for building.[39] The plans included houses in Redland Court Road, Cranbrook Road and in a new road to be known as Kersteman Road in honour of Mervyn Kersteman King who had first joined the Society in 1866 and who had been offered the Mastership for the second time in 1925 when he celebrated his eightieth birthday. It was not, however, until 1931 that development began. In that year the Real Property Committee reported that the land had been divided into building plots and that arrangements had been made to build houses in Redland Court Road worth £900, in Cranbrook Road £800 and in Kersteman Road £750 each. The houses were subject to ground rent and the Society was to approve the plans and control the design.[40] The Hall Books for the next three years show the gradual disposal of the various plots. By February 1935 they were producing ground rents of £227 1s. a year.[41]

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[33] *H.B.30*, p. 364, 22 March 1918; p. 371, 26 April 1918. The land was taken under the Cultivation of Lands Order of 1917. The Society protested against "such an arbitrary proceeding", but the matter was settled by compromise.

[34] *H.B.32*, p. 304, 25 Jan. 1934; p. 373, 28 June 1935; p. 355, 2 Aug. 1935, and numerous other references to the sealing of individual leases. See *H.B.32*, p. 355, 24 Jan. 1935 for the naming of the roads.

[35] *H.B.33*, p. 90, 27 May 1938.

[36] *H.B.33*, p. 389, 25 Jan. 1945; p. 393, 24 Feb. 1945. In 1955, the Society accepted the Corporation offer of £3,350 for the two pieces of land in Averay Road on which prefabricated houses stood (*H.B. 36*, p. 114, 30 Sept. 1935).

[37] *H.B.34*, p. 116, 24 July 1947; *H.B.35*, p. 314, 29 May 1953, and numerous other references.

[38] Society's archives: Clerk's Papers "Abstract of the Title of the Merchant Venturers . . . to land at Redland Green. . . ." 13 acres had been let to Colston's Girls' School in 1920 (*H.B.31*, p. 45, 30 Jan. 1920).

[39] *H.B.31*, p. 388, 27 May 1927.

[40] *H.B.32*, p. 151, 29 May 1931.

Another valuable piece of property which the Society at one time thought of developing itself was an area of 9 acres down by the river in Hotwells. This included the Merchants' Dock, which had been acquired in the eighteenth century.[42] Part of this area, known as the Cattle Lairs or Foreign Animals Wharf, was leased to the Corporation at a rent of £275 per annum at the beginning of the century and at £1,200 a year in the years 1961–5. The Merchants' Dock itself was leased for the whole of the period up to 1965 to Heber Denty & Co., and it presented considerable problems because of the difficulty of keeping out the mud. Another large tenant of the Hotwells dock property was Osborn and Wallis Ltd. In 1951 they agreed to renew their lease for seven years at £1,000 a year and for the next seven years at £1,250.[43] The Society arranged for all the leases of the dock property to expire in 1965, and in 1962 it consulted the City Planning Office about its proposals for this area of 9 acres. The Planning Office thought the area best suited for light industry or warehouses, and the Society considered the possibility of itself developing the site.[44] However, in 1963 Osborn and Wallis offered £75,000 for the land which they rented and for the Merchants' Dock. There was a good deal of discussion, for some members were reluctant for the Society to give up ownership of property which it had held since the eighteenth century, but in the end the Hall decided to sell.[45] The rest of the property, subject to leases to Heber Denty and the Corporation expiring in 1965, was sold by auction to Osborn and Wallis for £61,000 in 1964.[46]

Another area which the Society has at times considered developing is the garden ground at Richmond Hill, in which an interest had first been acquired in 1858.[47] This had been let as a nursery, and the Society had on occasions intervened to see that the tenant kept it in a satisfactory state.[48] In 1934, the Clerk looked into the restrictive covenants and reported that the Society was under no legal obligation to maintain it as an open space, although he thought that the question of whether there was a moral obligation was another matter. The possibility that the land might be built upon led to critical comments in the local newspapers, and the Treasurer wrote to the *Western Daily Press* pointing out that the press had stated the legal position incorrectly and that the Society had no obligation, moral or otherwise, to maintain it as an open space.[49] However, later in the year the Hall decided that it was not willing to let the land for building.[50] In 1945, an application was received to buy the land and build a first-class ballroom with other entertainment and refreshment facilities, but this was turned down.[51] Then, in 1954 the Surveyor approached a development company which submitted tentative plans for development, involving shops, showrooms and offices.[52] Early next year he suggested that the University of Bristol might be interested in the site for a Hall of Residence or for an extension to the Union. The Society decided to apply for planning permission for development.[53] Again, there was critical comment in the local press.[54] In April, planning permission was refused, and the Society put in a claim for compensation, which was eventually settled at £28,000.[55] The matter did not rest there, for in 1964 the Surveyor was instructed to make an application for development of part of the site, possibly as an office block and conference hall. Again, it was thought the University might be interested.[56] In the end, the Society decided to retain ownership of the land and to continue to let it as a nursery.[57]

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[41] *H.B.32*, p. 151, 29 May 1931; p. 172, 29 Oct. 1931; p. 360, 22 Feb. 1935, and numerous other references.

[42] See p. 154.

[43] It would take too much space to include here the very large number of references to the dock property in the years 1900–65 and I have thought it best to omit them.

[44] *H.B.38*, p. 153, 25 Oct. 1962; p. 172, 28 Dec. 1962.

[45] *H.B.38*, p. 218, 8 July 1963.

[46] *H.B.38*, p. 283, 15 May 1964.

[47] See pp. 331–2.

[48] E.g. *H.B.31*, p. 298, 24 July 1925. The Treasurer had seen the tenant who undertook to improve the cultivation and to keep the land in better order by planting flowers etc.

Problems of a different kind were presented by Victoria Square garden. As has been seen already, when the Society granted building leases and created ground rents in the middle of the nineteenth century, it had bound itself to maintain the private ornamental garden in the centre of the square for the use of residents. It was presumably relying on the cost of labour remaining low and on the full cooperation of the lessees in maintaining their amenity, but it was an unwise commitment. Even in the nineteenth century, the cost of maintaining the garden was a source of concern. It became increasingly serious as the twentieth century went on, for not only the garden but the walls and railings had to be maintained, and the cost of labour and materials rose continually. The income from ground rents remained stationary. As a number of the houses ceased to be occupied by families with servants and were converted into flats, there was no longer so much help from the residents in maintaining the garden, and there was also a good deal of vandalism. Responsibility for the garden was unquestionably fixed on the Society, and there were many complaints of neglect from the lessees.[58]

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[49] *H.B.32*, pp. 304 ff., 25 Jan. 1934; p. 311, 23 Feb. 1934; *H.B.38*, p. 81, 25 March 1955 referring to decision in 1934.

[50] *H.B.32*, p. 334, 28 Sept. 1934.

[51] *H.B.33*, p. 409, 25 May 1945.

[52] *H.B.35*, p. 410, 29 April 1954; *H.B.36*, p. 45, 19 Nov. 1959.

[53] *H.B.36*, p. 63, 27 Jan. 1955. Two other firms were also interested.

[54] *H.B.36*, p. 81, 25 March 1955.

[55] *H.B.36*, p. 114, 30 Sept. 1955; p. 162, 24 Feb. 1956; p. 168, 23 March 1956; p. 182, 25 May 1956.

[56] *H.B.38*, p. 270, 28 Feb. 1964; p. 273, 20 March 1964; p. 286, 29 May 1964; p. 295, 30 July 1964; *H.B.39*, p. 4, 25 Sept. 1964; p. 292, 26 June 1964.

[57] *H.B.39*, p. 20, 27 Nov. 1964; *H.B.41*, p. 36, 27 July 1972; p. 61, 23 Feb. 1973; p. 74, 26 April 1973; p. 81, 25 May 1973; 13 Sept. 1974.

When the residents' Garden Committee resigned in 1952, the Clerk suggested approaching the Corporation to see if it would take the garden over as a public open space.[59] This would require the consent of all the lessees, and some of them were not cooperative.[60] The Society struggled on trying to keep the garden in some sort of order at reasonable expense, but it was a losing battle. In 1961, the Surveyor called a meeting of the lessees at which the Society made an offer to renew the boundary fences, provide £100 for working expenses and thereafter give £100 a year for upkeep. The meeting was attended by about 20 lessees, and a supervisory committee was set up. Reporting on the meeting, the Surveyor said that one of the complainants had sent a postcard asking him to refer to Proverbs, chapter 24, verses 30 and 31. It read "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and the stone wall thereof was broken down". The Surveyor thought that v. 30 might be slightly libellous, but that v. 31 was justified by the fact. He suggested that the Society's further action might be in accordance with v. 32 which read "Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it and received instruction."[61]

Estimates for putting the garden, railings and walls into some kind of order ranged from £2,000 to £2,387,[62] and by 1964 the Surveyor reported that he was having increasing difficulty in satisfying some of the lessees that the Society was fulfilling its obligation.[63] In 1965, the Chief Public Health Inspector complained that the fencing had collapsed and that litter and food refuse were a danger to health.[64]

The sad story continued, and the problem took up a great deal of the Society's time. A special committee appointed to look into the matter reported in February 1967 that the architectural value of Victoria Square was being increasingly appreciated and that there was no prospect of getting planning permission for redevelopment of the garden. The liability for its upkeep was not being met, and a great deal of money would have to be spent in putting it in order. The committee contemplated offering financial and other inducements to the lessees to release the Society from its obligation, but in July 1967 it was reported that the cost of the proposals would be about £7,000 and that another £5,000 would be needed to put the garden in a reasonable state.[65] Agreement was eventually reached with the Corporation and the lessees by which the Society spent £2,000 on the garden and then let it at a nominal rent to the Corporation to which it transferred the ground rents. The garden thus became a public open space.[66] It is an interesting example of the way in which an obligation undertaken at one period of time can in the long run involve expenses out of all proportion to the original intention.

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[58] There are many references to Victoria Square Gardens in the *Hall Books*, but it seems best not to include them all here.

[59] *H.B.36*, pp. 214 ff., 24 July 1952; p. 230, 26 Sept. 1952.

[60] *H.B.36*, p. 241, 30 Oct. 1952; p. 257, 28 Nov. 1952; p. 270, 19 Dec. 1952.

[61] *H.B.38*, p. 80, 20 Oct. 1961; p. 93, 24 Nov. 1961; p. 99, 29 Dec. 1961.

[62] *H.B.38*, p. 112, 23 Feb. 1962; p. 120, 30 March 1962.

[63] *H.B.38*, p. 279, 23 April 1964.

[64] *H.B.39*, p. 90, 10 Sept. 1965.

The Society's springs at Hotwells continued in the twentieth century to display the ability they had shown earlier of raising hopes which were not to be fulfilled. In 1912, the Treasurer received a report that the Hotwells springs had twice as much radium as the waters at Bath, and as radium was then a magic word, the springs were investigated. An analysis of the water from the pump at the bottom of the Zigzag path showed that the water was polluted and not fit to drink. The well in the Colonnade property had a radio activity of 0·1418 grammes in a million litres and was polluted by sewage. The water in the gully formerly known as Oakham Slade Spring had no radium of commercial value, and St. Vincent's Spring, Avon Gorge, was practically sterile. There would not be another boom at Hotwells.[67]

Another piece of property of great historic interest was the Observatory and Giant's Cave on Clifton Down. For the whole of the century up to 1943 it was in the tenancy of Miss Edith West whose father had first taken it over in the later nineteenth century.[68] She was not an altogether satisfactory tenant. There were arrears of the rent and complaints about the state of the Giant's Cave and the difficulty of access to the Observatory. In 1929, the Kyrle Society protested about the objectionable Automatic Machines, and the Treasurer was instructed to see that they were removed.[69] The Society resisted the application of Fred Cripps of the Palais de

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[65] *H.B.39*, p. 187, 24 Feb. 1967; p. 210, 27 July 1967.

[66] *H.B.40*, p. 46, 28 June 1968; p. 58, 13 Sept. 1968; p. 243, 26 March 1971.

[67] *H.B.30*, p. 76, 25 Oct. 1912; p. 86, 29 Nov. 1912; pp. 89, 91, 20 Dec. 1912.

[68] For its earlier history, see pp. 427–8. The Society agreed to spend £550 on putting it in repair in 1905 (*H.B.29*, p. 128, 17 Feb. 1905) and another £85 in 1918 (*H.B.30*, p. 391, 27 Sept. 1918).

[69] *H.B.29*, p. 400, 29 April 1910; *H.B.31*, p. 164, 28 July 1922; p. 186, 26 Jan. 1923; *H.B.32*, p. 48, 26 April 1929. The *Hall Book* does not say what was objectionable about the machines. Possibly they were of the type which showed what the Butler saw.

Danse, Barton Hill, to rent the Camera Obscura for the purpose of his business[70] and seems to have been a patient landlord to its determined tenant. In 1933, there were hopes that she would vacate the premises, but they were not fulfilled.[71] In 1939, after a letter had been forwarded by the Town Clerk complaining about an alleged assault on a visitor, Miss West was given notice to quit,[72] but the coming of War altered the situation, and she stayed on. At first, it was thought that the Royal Air Force would require the Observatory, but when it did not, part of the premises was requisitioned by the Local Defence Volunteers, later known as the Home Guard.[73] The indomitable Miss West continued to occupy the remaining part, and court proceedings were necessary before she could at last be persuaded to leave on 1 January 1943.[74]

The part of the premises which had been occupied by the Home Guard was de-requisitioned in February 1945. Bristol Corporation then asked if the Society would lease or give the Observatory for use as a public refreshment place. It offered a rent of £10 a year for 25 years, with an option to renew up to 99 years. It would not be used as a Dance Hall and nothing would be allowed which would create a nuisance "such as blatant music or the use of loud speakers".[75] Nothing came of this, and instead the Observatory was leased to Mr. Caple for £10 a year. He was allowed to use the Camera Obscura and make it available to the public, and he was to keep the place wind and water-tight.[76] Mr. Caple was given notice in 1959, and the Society then considered elaborate plans to fit out the Observatory as a restaurant. However, the estimated cost was £9,000, and the Society decided as an immediate step to put the Observatory and Cave into repair and to get someone to run it on a weekly wage until the matter could be considered further.[77] Mr. and Mrs. Hagan were engaged, and a Bristol Observatory Company was registered with Mr. K. H. Trigg as Secretary.[78] In 1970–1,

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[70] *H.B.31*, p. 231, 29 Feb. 1924.

[71] *H.B.32*, p. 278, 26 July 1933; p. 285, 29 Sept. 1933; p. 288, 25 Oct. 1933; p. 303, 25 Jan. 1934.

[72] *H.B.33*, p. 141, 30 June 1939.

[73] *H.B.33*, p. 179, 23 Feb. 1940; p. 196, 28 June 1940; p. 203, 27 Sept. 1940.

[74] *H.B.33*, p. 275, 29 May 1942; p. 286, 28 Oct. 1942; p. 295, 27 Nov. 1942; p. 297, 18 Dec. 1942; p. 299, 27 Jan. 1943.

[75] *H.B.33*, p. 414, 26 July 1945; p. 421, 28 Sept. 1945; *H.B.34*, pp. 24 ff., 24 Jan. 1946.

[76] *H.B.34*, p. 66, 27 Sept. 1946. The Observatory was listed as an Ancient Monument (*H.B.34*, p. 337, 16 Dec. 1949).

[77] *H.B.37*, p. 142, 25 March 1959; p. 151, 23 April 1959; p. 174, 16 July 1959; pp. 191, 192, 25 Sept. 1959; p. 219, 18 Dec. 1959; p. 229, 28 Jan. 1960; p. 252, 28 April 1960.

[78] *H.B.37*, p. 274, 16 Sept. 1960; *H.B.38*, p. 25, 24 Feb. 1961; p. 42, 27 April 1961; p. 49, 26 May 1961.

43,000 people visited the Camera Obscura and 35,600 visited the Giant's Cave, and the Company made a modest profit of £448. In the next year, £618 was spent on repairs, and the profit was £276.[79]

Although it is not possible here to examine all the developments and changes relating to the Society's property, it will be clear from what has been said that the management of it has required a great deal of time and thought of the Treasurer, the Clerks, the Surveyors and many of the members, and that although the ownership of property has its advantages, it is not without its problems.

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[79] *H.B.40*, p. 261, 29 July 1971; *H.B.41*, p. 43, 26 Oct. 1972.

CHAPTER 25

The Society and Education in the Twentieth Century

THE MERCHANT VENTURERS' TECHNICAL COLLEGE

WE have seen how at the end of the nineteenth century the remarkable success of the College and the expansion in numbers raised serious problems over accommodation and finance and how the Society was compelled reluctantly to consider obtaining help from the local authority.[1] The Governors of the College felt that University College was attracting much more than its fair share of the money available for technical education.[2] At the end of 1901, the City's Technical Instruction Committee agreed to make an annual grant to the College of £3,000 a year provided that the Society would contribute up to £2,000 a year. It must also provide more accommodation and must try to reach agreement with University College and the Bristol School Board about overlapping classes. The Society thereupon rented a large warehouse in Rosemary Street for the use of the College[3] and came to an agreement with the Bristol School Board. The local authority grant was paid to the College from 1902 and at the same time the local authority obtained the right to put two representatives on the governing body.[4]

There was a major set-back in the history of the College in 1906 when early in the morning of 9 October the main building in Unity Street was completely destroyed by fire.[5] It was yet one more tribute to the brilliant administrative ability of the Principal, Julius Wertheimer, that by 15 October both day and evening students were back at work.[6] The blow to the Society was all the greater because it was at this time that it received a letter from Lewis Fry's committee asking for cooperation in establishing a University of Bristol, and the Society's bargaining position was much weaker since its College buildings had now been destroyed.[7] In January 1907, the insurance claim was settled at £38,500,[8] and in February, taking into account that there was no immediate prospect of a University being established and that Julius Wertheimer was very concerned that the College had already lost about 300 pupils, the Society decided to proceed immediately with rebuilding.[9]

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[1] See pp. 384–5. For a fuller discussion of the problems, see D. J. Eames, "The Contribution of the Society of Merchant Venturers to the Development of Education in Bristol", unpublished, Bristol M.A. thesis, 1966, pp. 268 ff.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 284. See also p. 281 for a table showing the comparative numbers in the two institutions in 1897–8. The figures for the M.V.T.C. were much more impressive than those for University College both in range and numbers.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 285. In 1924 the Society bought the premises for £4,500 (*H.B.31*, p. 222, 30 Nov. 1923; p. 230, 29 Feb. 1924; p. 243, 30 May 1924).

[4] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

[5] *H.B.29*, p. 209, 9 Oct. 1906; *Western Daily Press*, 9 Oct. 1906.

[6] *H.B.29*, p. 211, 15 Oct. 1906. Castle Green School was placed at his disposal by the City's Education Committee and use was made of the laboratories in

Shortly afterwards, the primary department of the Technical College was transferred to Wyndham House, Kingsdown, which was leased from the Bristol Charity Trustees.[10] In 1908 the lease and responsibility for the primary department was transferred to Bristol Grammar School, and the Governors were free to concentrate only on secondary, technical and higher education.[11]

The long and acrimonious negotiations over the role which the Merchant Venturers' Technical College should play in the new University of Bristol have been examined elsewhere.[12] The upshot was that in 1909 the Society provided a home for the Faculty of Engineering, and Julius Wertheimer was nominated by the Society as first Dean of the Faculty. The engineering staff and the equipment of the University's Department of Engineering were moved to the new building in Unity Street, and the Society was directly involved in the University. At the same time, the Technical College continued its work of secondary and technical education, including evening classes.

Just before the outbreak of the First World War, the total number of students, including evening students, was over 2,000, and the new Engineering Faculty in the first year of its existence had 92 day students and 482 evening students.[13]

After the War, the pressure of student numbers compelled the Governors to make a choice between giving up the Secondary School or the Faculty of Engineering. It was decided that the Faculty had the stronger claim, and after long negotiations, the Bristol Education Committee agreed to take over the secondary school from the end of the summer term in 1919, provided temporary accommodation

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Colston's Girls' School. Wertheimer certainly deserved the gift of £50 which the Society gave him at Christmas for a holiday abroad (*H.B.29*, p. 216, 27 Oct. 1906).

[7] See p. 495.

[8] *H.B.29*, p. 231, 25 Jan. 1907.

[9] *H.B.29*, pp. 242 ff., 4 Feb. 1907; p. 246, 22 Feb. 1907.

[10] *H.B.29*, p. 262, 31 May 1907.

[11] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

[12] See pp. 491–508.

[13] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 288, 289, with breakdown of the different kinds of students between 1912 and 1916.

could be found for it and provided it could use the College workshops. The new school was established in huts at Cotham and was carried on there by the local authority under the name of the Merchant Venturers' Secondary School until a new building was opened in 1931 under the name of Cotham Secondary School.[14]

When the Society had first taken over the Trade School in the later nineteenth century, it had been prepared to spend £2,000 a year on its upkeep, but between 1900 and 1920 it had, at least on paper, rarely spent less than £3,000 a year, and by 1919–20, the college was in debt to the Society for about £5,000.[15] The cost of running the College was likely to rise considerably in the future, and in order to limit its liability after the War, the Society under the guidance of its Treasurer, W. W. Ward, decided in 1920 to set up an Education Trust, in the first instance for ten years. The contribution the Society was prepared to make to the College was limited by the income of the Trust.[16] When the local authority grant was reduced in 1923, the Society informed the Management Committee that it was unable to increase its contribution beyond the income of the Trust and that the Management Committee and the local authority must arrange to continue on this basis.[17]

In 1920, G. H. Pope, who had played for so many years a leading role in framing the Society's education policy, decided to resign as Secretary of the College and of Colston's Boys' School. His attitude towards University College during the difficult negotiations over the founding of the University was at times open to justifiable criticism,[18] but there can be no doubt that he had contributed in full measure to the amazing success of the Technical College. The Society decided to pay him a retaining fee of £450 a year for life in return for his advice and experience. The Treasurer, W. W. Ward, then took over his duties.[19] Four years later, the death took place of Julius Wertheimer, who had been Principal of the College for 35 years and who had been first Dean of the Faculty of Engineering.[20] He too had been a difficult man in many ways, but his tremendous drive and his great organising ability had given the Society one of the most remarkable Technical Colleges in the country.[21] He was succeeded as Principal and Dean of the Faculty of Engineering by Professor Andrew Robertson.

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[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 295 ff.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 299. The financial situation was somewhat complicated because the Society charged the College rent for the premises, regarding this an interest payment on the sum which the Society had originally spent on them.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 300; *H.B.31*, p. 75, 24 Sept. 1920, when the seal was ordered to be put on the Trust Deed. The Trust consisted of £10,000 in 5 per cent War Stock; £2,000 in 6 per cent Bristol Housing Bonds; £8,000 in National War Bonds.

[17] *H.B.31*, p. 194, 23 March 1923.

[18] See pp. 491–508.

[19] *H.B.31*, pp. 85 ff., 26 Nov. 1920.

[20] *H.B.31*, p. 250, 26 Sept. 1924; p. 255, 25 Oct. 1924. In 1938 Professor Andrew Robertson reported that Mrs. Wertheimer was seriously ill after a stroke and was in financial difficulties. The Society made a gift to her and was willing to provide a pension if necessary. She died in 1941 and three-quarters of her late husband's estate, in which she had a life interest, then passed to the Society for providing scholarships at the College (*H.B.33*, p. 79, 25 Feb. 1938; p. 228, 21 Feb. 1941).

The continuing expansion of the College made it necessary to acquire additional space. The premises in Rosemary Street, which had been rented from early in the century, were bought in 1924, for £4,500, and 9 Unity Street was purchased for £2,140. Both were rented by the Society to the College.[22] Two years later, the Rosemary Street propery was sold for £6,000, and, on the recommendation of the College's Management Committee, the Society bought premises in Leek Lane for £8,000 and the site of an old public house, *The Prince of Wales*, for £500.[23]

There was further expansion as a result of the decision in 1928 to take over the Bath and West of England College of Pharmacy and Chemistry. The Technical College's new department was opened in October 1929 and was financed jointly by the Society, the Board of Education and the Local Education Authority, the Society's contribution being £1,300.

In 1930, the Society accepted a tender for £14,898 for extension of the College on the corner of College Green and Unity Street. It had already been agreed in 1928 that the Local Education Authority should increase its grant and have four instead of two representatives on the Management Committee.[24] In all this the Principal, Professor Andrew Robertson, had played a major role, and in 1931 the Management Committee asked the Society to make a present of some plate to him in recognition of the completion of agreements with the University of Bristol and the local authority and of his negotiations with the Board of Education, as a result of which the grants made by all these bodies were sufficient to enable the College to balance its accounts.[25]

The College continued to expand throughout the nineteen-thirties, and in 1935 it asked the Society to purchase an island site bounded by Leek Lane, Callowhill Street, Hanover Street and Water

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[21] In 1919–20, there were 226 Students in the Faculty of Engineering as compared with 191 in the University of Birmingham, 125 in Armstrong College, Newcastle, and 117 in the University of Sheffield. Evening students in 1921 numbered 2,156 (D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 298).

[22] *H.B.31*, p. 243, 30 May 1924; p. 253, 24 Oct. 1924; p. 284, 24 April 1924.

[23] *H.B.31*, pp. 335, 336, 26 March 1926. £2,428 was expended on equipment at Leek Lane on which an interest of 5 per cent was charged to the College (*H.B.31*, p. 396, 30 Sept. 1927).

[24] *H.B.32*, p. 26, 30 March 1928; *H.B.33*, p. 81, 29 Nov. 1929; p. 85, 20 Dec. 1929; pp. 97, 98, 1 May 1930; p. 113, 26 Sept. 1930; D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 299, 301.

[25] *H.B.32*, p. 170, 29 Oct. 1931; p. 186, 18 Dec. 1931.

Street for extensions which would be necessary in the near future. Part of the property which was not required was resold.[26]

The ever-growing demand for technical education obviously raised problems for the Society whose Technical College also included a Faculty of Engineering. Sooner or later the question was bound to arise as to how far the Society with its limited resources could continue to contribute to the cost of both the Faculty and the non-Faculty work. In the mid-thirties, the Society's contribution to non-Faculty work was in fact greatly exceeded by the amounts received in grants from the Board of Education and the Local Authority and the amount which the Society could make available was in any case limited by the income of the Education Trust of 1920.[27]

As early as 1931, the Society considered a report of the Principal on the possible future of the College in relation to technical education,[28] but it was not until 1936 that the matter became urgent when the Board of Education issued a circular stating that it was considering a great expansion of technical education and was prepared to make available a large amount of money.[29] The Board asked the Governors of the Technical College to explore the future jointly with the Local Education Authority and expressed the view that some of the work in the Technical College was being done under unsatisfactory conditions. A joint committee of the Society and the Local Education Authority met on 7 February 1936 and decided that the time had come for the whole of the non-Faculty work of the College to come under the control of the Local Education Authority. The Faculty of Engineering was to be separated from the College and put in another building. The Senior Warden and the First Assistant then consulted with the Board of Education which did not wish to be directly involved at that stage, and on 28 February 1936 the Standing Committee set up a sub-committee to negotiate with the Local Education Authority and the University. The brief to the sub-committee informed it that there was reason to think that the

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[26] *H.B.33*, p. 376, 25 July 1935; p. 381, 27 Sept. 1935; p. 398, 20 Dec. 1935.

[27] See *Sub-Committee Minute Book M.V.T.C. 3 March 1936–June 1950* under 11 February 1936 and 12 March 1936 and a paper of G. H. Beloe (the Treasurer) dated 18 March 1936. The L.E.A. and The Board of Education grants were both £9,000. The Society's contribution from its Education Trust was £1,200. Mr. Beloe pointed out that the book value of the building and equipment, written up in 1920 when the Trust was formed, was £100,000 and that "the rent of £4,000 received from the College, being 4 per cent on this valuation, forms the greater part of the Income of the Trust and it must therefore be realised that the £5,000 represented as the contribution of the Society to the College is actually an inflated figure".

[28] *H.B.32*, p. 155, 26 June 1931.

[29] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

Local Education Authority would prefer the Society to withdraw freely from the field and that there appeared to be "a considerable amount of feeling in the City Council that the City should control a work which they and the Board of Education together subsidised to the extent of 75% of the total cost."[30]

In the light of this, the Society was willing to surrender the Technical College to the Local Education Authority, but it wished to maintain a link both with the Faculty and non-Faculty work, and it negotiated on the basis of continuing to give three-quarters of the income from its Educational Trust to the Faculty and one-quarter to the Local Education Authority. This was to be used for technical education, and it was hoped that it would be allocated to some specific purpose "which would be identified with the Society and over which the Society should, if possible, have some measure of control". It was prepared to negotiate with the Local Education Authority for the sale to it of the College buildings.[31] These negotiations ran into difficulties because there was a difference of opinion about the value of the property and about whether the main building, which the Board of Education considered unsatisfactory for its purpose, should be valued as "an empty shell". The Society's valuer put the price at £96,350, but the District Valuer put it at only £61,800. The Society then decided to tell the Corporation to formulate its own plans irrespective of the Society, but added that if it required the Unity Street premises, the Society would help.[32] In March 1937, the Treasurer reported that in a letter of 29 January the Local Education Authority had decided that the Unity Street property was not suitable for its purpose, but that it would negotiate to buy the Leek Lane property. The Society decided to offer this at a figure which would cover its cost without any profit. There was a meeting with the Local Education Authority on 5 July 1937 when the Treasurer estimated the Society's expenditure on the Leek Lane site at £5,100 and it was stated that the valuation by the City Valuer would be submitted to the Board of Education. After that, there is no further entry in the Minute Book until 9 June 1944.[33]

The Merchant Venturers Technical College thus remained independent. It continued its work under growing difficulties owing to the expansion of numbers and the problems arising from the War. From 1939 to 1943 it accommodated, in addition to its own students, evacuees from the Engineering Department of King's College, London, and from the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, and it also ran a large number of war-time short courses.[34]

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[30] The Minutes of this sub-committee were kept by Miss G. E. Whitaker. They cover the period 3 March 1936 to June 1950 and contain in addition to the Minutes some very helpful notes on the origin and history of the Technical College. They are subsequently referred to as *Sub-Committee Minute Book 1936–1950*. A statement of the background is attached to the Minutes of the first meeting on 3 March 1936.

[31] *Sub-Committee Minute Book 1936–1950*, 3 April 1936; 28 April 1936. See also *H.B.32*, p. 409, 12 March 1936; p. 415, 20 March 1936.

[32] *Sub-Committee Minute Book 1936–1950*, 13 May 1936; 9 Oct. 1936; 13 Oct. 1936; 26 Oct. 1936; 11 Nov. 1936.

[33] *Ibid.*, 22 March 1937; 5 July 1937.

Owing to the pressure on the existing accommodation, the Society decided in 1944 to rent J. S. Fry & Sons' buildings on Brandon Steep at the rear of the present Council House, and the Commerce Department of the Technical College was transferred there in 1946. However, it was soon after transformed into a separate College of Commerce and control of it was surrendered to the Local Education Authority.[35] Thus, the Merchant Venturers' Technical College shed one more of its activities, just as it had earlier disposed of its Primary Department to Bristol Grammar School and its Secondary Department to the Local Education Authority.[36] The Faculty of Engineering and the non-Faculty technological work still remained, but the end was already in sight.

In 1944, after receiving a letter from the University saying that at the request of the University Grants Committee it was preparing estimates for the post-war period and that it would like the Society's views on what was to happen when the time came in 1950 for separating the Faculty of Engineering from the other work of the Technical College, the Standing Committee set up a sub-committee to look into the question. Although there would obviously have to be a major change when the agreement with the University and the Education Trust both came to an end in 1950, the Society and the University were very anxious to continue the close relationship which had been built up since 1909.[37] As far as the non-Faculty work was concerned, the Education Act of 1944 indicated that the Government wanted to bring technical education under the control of the Local Education Authorities, and this meant that sooner or later the Society would have to give up its non-Faculty work in the Technical College.

The beginning of the end came in 1947 when the Society's sub-committee recommended that the Educational Trust should end on 31 December 1950, that the University and the Local Education Authority should be formally notified and also told that the Society would be considering the future of the buildings in which the Technical College was situated.[38] Lengthy negotiations followed with the University and with the Local Education Authority. On 31 July 1949, the City took over the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and purchased the property from the Society.[39] The Faculty of Engineering, however, continued to occupy part of the building until its new home in the Queen's Building was ready and, as has been noted elsewhere,[40] the Society's link with the University was maintained. The surplus of approximately £6,000 in the Education Trust was used partly to pay the first two instalments of £1,000 a year given to the University of Bristol from 1949, partly to finance the grant of £100 a year for seven years to Clifton College for scholarships, and partly to help Colston's Boys' School.[41]

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[34] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 354, 355.

[36] See pp. 478–9.

[37] *H.B.33*, p. 347, 31 March 1944; *Sub-Committee Minute Book 1936–1950*, 9 June 1944; D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 356, note, points out that in 1928 both the Trust and the Agreement with the University had been renewed for ten years from 1930 and that it must be assumed that they had been renewed again for ten years some time before 1940, although there does not seem to be any record of this in the Society's archives.

The Society of Merchant Venturers' Technical College was a remarkable institution. In the later nineteenth century the Society had taken over and transformed an existing institution – The Bristol Trade and Mining School – and in the course of time it had become a unique Technical College combining a Primary Department, a Secondary Department, a Department of Commerce, and full time and evening classes for a great variety of technical work, much of it at a very high level. After 1909 the college also embodied the Engineering Faculty of the new University. It gave birth to the preparatory school of Bristol Grammar School, Cotham Secondary School, the College of Commerce and a University Faculty. When the Society gave up the Technical College in 1949, the City took over, and from the higher technical work which was carried on in the City's College at Ashley Down there was to emerge in due course the new University of Bath. As Miss Whitaker comments in her Notes on the History of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, the Society had been pioneers in the task of providing technical education in Bristol and the City was able to build on their foundations.[42]

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[38] *Sub-Committee Minute Book 1936–1950*, 25 April 1947. D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 357–8, suggests that the final decision to bring the College to an end was not taken until 1948 and that in 1947 the Society was still prepared to carry on if the Government and the Local Education Authority wished it to do so, but I am not convinced that this was so.

[39] *H.B.34*, p. 343, 26 Jan. 1950. On 20 January there was completed the sale of the main building in Unity Street for £121,000 and of the Leek Lane site for £27,750. The sale of the island site for £5,164 4s. 5d. was to be completed on 17 Febuary.

[40] See pp. 508–10.

[41] See typescript entry in *Sub-Committee Minute Book 1936–1950* on "The Education Trust of the Society".

[42] See her Notes in *Sub-Committee Minute Book 1936–1950*.

COLSTON'S BOYS' SCHOOL

It has been noted earlier that under the Scheme drawn up in 1873, Colston's Boys' School was reorganised and came under the direction of a new Governing Body which was not answerable to the Society. Nevertheless, a very close connection was maintained between the School and the Society, since the Society continued to act as trustee for the Colston Trust funds and nominated 13 out of the 23 Governors of the School.[43] The close connection has continued to the present day and the problems of the School have been of the greatest concern to the Society.

The history of the School cannot be examined in detail here,[44] but it is necessary to note certain aspects which were of particular concern to the Society. In 1910, a new Scheme of government was approved by the Board of Education and the number of free places was fixed at 75, but the Society still retained its controlling interest on the managing body.[45] In 1918 the Society was asked by the Governors to sell the Manors of Beere and Locking and invest the proceeds on behalf of the Colston Trust.[46] The school spent £3,950 on new classrooms in 1926, but the Chairman was able to announce that he had collected the money from various sources, and the Society itself contributed £2,000 to liquidate the School's debts.[47] In various other ways, the Society was able to help the School and those connected with it. When the Treasurer discovered in 1906 that the school sanatorium had been built on the Society's own lands which might be required for development, the Hall decided to let the school keep the land for a nominal rent of £1 a year.[48] £30 was given for a rifle range in 1906, and 50 guineas towards the cost of a new Library in 1910.[49] Next year, when the School needed additional playing fields, the Society agreed to lease it 4 acres at £15 per annum.[50] In 1934, £250 was given for a new Pavilion, and just before World War II the Society agreed to pay for a cricket coach.[51] Help was sometimes given to former Colston pupils who had gone to the University, and a pension was paid for some years to the widow of a headmaster who died suddenly.[52] In 1940, the Society built some houses for the married staff at a cost of over £3,000 and presented them to the School,[53] and a number of individual Merchant Venturers such as C. B. Fry, who was Chairman of the Governors from 1929–42, E. A. Allen and T. R. Davey made gifts amounting to £8,000 for University Scholarships.[54]

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[43] See p. 374.

[44] For a detailed examination of its history, see D. J. Eames, "The Contribution of the Society of Merchant Venturers to the Development of Education in Bristol", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis, 1966, pp. 178 ff., 309 ff.

[45] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 183; *H.B.31*, p. 334, 26 March 1926.

[48] *H.B.29*, p. 182, 30 March 1906; p. 199, 22 June 1906; *H.B.30*, p. 116, 30 May 1913.

[49] *H.B.29*, p. 184, 30 March 1906; p. 394, 25 Feb. 1910.

[50] *H.B.29*, p. 438, 27 Jan. 1911; p. 443, 24 Feb. 1911; p. 445, 24 March 1911.

[51] *H.B.32*, p. 317, 20 April 1934; *H.B.33*, p. 130, 31 March 1939.

The 1944 Education Act presented the Governors with a serious problem about the school's future. Its income was drawn partly from the resources of the Colston Trust, partly from fees and partly from grants received from public authorities. In 1926, it had opted to become a Direct Grant School receiving money from the Board of Education in return for providing a number of free places. After very lengthy discussion and much negotiation, the Governors came to the conclusion that it should become an Independent School. This meant that it would cease to receive grants, that it would phase out the free places and become, apart from a handful of free places, an entirely fee-paying school.[55] Possibly because it did not attract enough boarders, the Governors decided to admit 20 day boys whose numbers were to be increased to 30 and even to 60 as soon as possible. Owing to post-war restrictions, it was impossible to obtain a licence for a new building, but accommodation was found for the Headmaster in Stapleton Rectory, and the house formerly occupied by him was used for day boys. All this cost money, and the Society lent £4,000 interest free. Shortly afterwards, it changed the loan to a free gift.[56]

From 1953, discussions went on with the Department of Education and Science for a new Scheme, and eventually agreement was reached that there should be 32 Special Places in the School. The completely free places, of which there were only 6 in 1954, were to come to an end, and the Special Places provided free tuition and partial or total remission of boarding fees according to parental circumstances.[57]

In 1955, the Governors decided to build a second Day Boys' House and to improve the facilities for Science teaching. The money for the science laboratories came from an industrial trust, but the Society was asked to help with the Day Boys' house. It eventually decided to provide an interest-free loan of £12,000 and the new block was opened in 1957.[58]

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[52] *H.B.31*, p. 168, 29 Sept. 1922; p. 173, 28 Oct. 1922; p. 244, 27 June 1924; p. 297, 24 July 1925.

[53] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 190, 191.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[55] For a discussion of the reasons behind all this and the way in which it was implemented, see D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 309 ff.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 314; *H.B.35*, p. 80, 25 May 1951. The £4,000 was available after the winding-up of the Society's Education Trust.

[57] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 316 ff.

From 1958 onwards, the Governors were very anxious for the school to become a public school. This meant adjusting the entry so that boys could come in at thirteen, as well as at eleven, and improving facilities. It would be necessary to build a second Boarding House and make other alterations costing about £72,000. The Governors then launched the 250th Anniversary Appeal, and the Chairman of the Governors, Mr. V. Fuller Eberle, addressed the Society and asked it to give generous support to the attempt to increase the status of the school. After examining the position with great care, the Society decided to make a gift of £10,000 over 7 years and to make a loan of £25,000, of which it hoped at least some would be repaid, over a period of 20 years. The Governors were planning for a school of 200 boarders, 100 day boys and a Preparatory School of 120.[59]

Efforts to raise the status of the school to that of other Independent Schools continued, and in 1963 educational consultants were called in. They suggested that there should be a new Boarding House, a new Library, boys' studies, tennis and squash courts and other improvements estimated to cost £100,000. On 11 October 1963 Mr. J. E. C. Clarke, Chairman of the Governors, reported the proposals to the Society and asked for generous help. About £25,000 could be raised by the school itself, but the rest would have to be raised by mortgage and by loans. Some members of the Society were concerned because there was by this time a possibility that the school would be "nationalised", that is to say, taken over by the Local Education Authority which had plans for a completely comprehensive system of education in Bristol.

For various reasons, the Society was not anxious to dispose of stocks and shares. Thus, there followed lengthy discussions, but in the end the Society decided to make a loan of £80,000 on very favourable terms indeed. In 1965, the Chairman of the Governors reported that the total cost of the work, including building a new house for the Headmaster, had risen from £100,000 to £133,000, but that the extra money required had been raised from other sources.[60]

In subsequent years, further efforts were made to improve the school. Like many Independent Schools, it has to face considerable difficulties, and although the Society is not directly responsible, it feels that it has a moral obligation to help in every way it can.[61]

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[58] *H.B.36*, p. 138, 25 Nov. 1955; p. 143, 16 Dec. 1955; D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 319, 320.

[59] *H.B.37*, p. 199, 29 Oct. 1959; p. 204, 30 Oct. 1959; p. 219, 18 Dec. 1959; p. 229, 28 Jan. 1960; p. 260, 27 May 1960; D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 320 ff.

[60] *H.B.38*, p. 235, 11 Oct. 1963; p. 255, 13 Dec. 1963; p. 258, 17 Jan. 1964; *H.B.39*, p. 28, 15 Jan. 1965; p. 88, 10 Sept. 1965; p. 96, 8 Oct. 1965. See also D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 322 ff.

Thus, in the course of time, the Hospital for 100 poor boys which Edward Colston founded in the early eighteenth century has been transformed into an independent fee-paying school with high academic standards. The major change in its character in 1873 was the result primarily of pressure from the Government and was not a deliberate choice of the Society, but after the change took place and the Society ceased to be directly responsible, it has made a major contribution to the very successful history of Colston's Boys' School.

COLSTON'S GIRLS' SCHOOL

In the twentieth century, the Society maintained its close connection with Colston's Girls' School which the Colston Trustees had opened in 1891.[62] The Society appointed a majority of the Governing Body of the School and its endowments were managed by the Colston Trustees. Although the Governors were not answerable directly to the Society, they naturally looked to it for help and advice in times of difficulty. The Society felt that it had a moral, if not a legal, responsibility to help. Although the growth of the School made it impossible after 1904 to provide office room and clerical assistance in the Merchants' Hall,[63] the Society did what it could to help the school develop its facilities. Thus, in 1916 when money was required to provide more apparatus for the teaching of the physical sciences and biology and to increase the amount of equipment in the Secretarial Training Department, the Society made a donation of £300,[64] and in 1920 it agreed to provide a Sports Pavilion at an estimated cost of £850.[65] In 1924, it was ready to contribute generously to the cost of a new gymnasium, and it bought 13 acres of land which it rented to the School at a nominal rent for sports' facilities.[66] It administered various funds left to provide University Scholarships for the girls,[67] and some girls were given assistance from the Society's own funds to enable them to go to Universities.[68]

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[61] *H.B.40*, p. 180, 16 March 1970. For later developments, see *H.B.40*, p. 269, 28 Sept. 1971; *H.B.41*, p. 67, 9 April 1973; p. 84, 23 June 1973.

[62] See p. 575. For the history of the school in the twentieth century, see D. J. Eames "The Contribution of the Society of Merchant Venturers to the Development of Education in Bristol", unpublished Bristol M.A. thesis 1966, pp. 211 ff., 327 ff.

[63] *H.B.29*, p. 84, 19 Feb. 1904.

[64] *H.B.30*, p. 271, 28 July 1916.

[65] *H.B.31*, p. 65, 25 June 1920.

[66] *H.B.31*, p. 264, 28 Nov. 1924; D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

[67] E.g. Gatcliff scholarships, Gamble scholarships, Proctor Baker scholarships. See also *H.B.31*, p. 21, 17 Oct. 1919 for gift by Mervyn King to provide silver cups for sports.

There was a new Scheme of Management for the School in 1936 under which the Society nominated 9 of the Governors, Bristol Local Education Authority 5, the University of Bristol 1, and the Gloucestershire and Somerset Local Education Authority 1 each. Four more, all of them women, were to be co-opted.[69]

The 1944 Education Act and its implementation raised serious problems for the Governors. They hoped that the Ministry would agree to it being a Direct Grant School, but the Ministry of Education refused the application and informed the Governors that the School would be removed from the list from 1 January 1946. This came as a great shock, and the reasons why the Minister made this decision are not clear. The Governors endeavoured without success to get the decision reversed, and then gave a great deal of thought to what could now be done. The School could become independent; it could apply to be a Voluntary Aided School if the managers would agree to pay half the cost of the improvements needed to bring it up to Ministry standards; or it could apply to be a Voluntary Controlled School, in which case the Local Education Authority would be responsible for its maintenance and would have the right to appoint two-thirds of the Governors. After much discussion, it was decided to apply for Voluntary Aided status. This entitled the Local Education Authority to appoint one-third of the Governors, but the Governors could allow denominational religious instruction, whereas if it had been Voluntary Controlled, the religious instruction would have had to be in accordance with the "Agreed Syllabus". Under the new arrangement, the School ceased to be a fee-paying school, and the first intake of free-place girls entered in September 1946. Under a new Instrument of Government which was eventually agreed, there were 14 Foundation Governors, of whom 9 were nominated by the Society, 1 by the University, 4 by resolution of the Foundation Governors, and another 7, known as Representative Governors, were appointed by the Local Education Authority.

The Governors also decided in 1946 that the change in status would make it necessary to get rid of the Froebel Foundation Training Department and the Junior School. The Local Education Authority agreed to take over the Junior School, and from August 1946 this became Colston's Primary School.[70]

A number of problems still remained. For a time, both the

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[68] e.g. *H.B.31*, p. 367, 26 Nov. 1926; p. 397, 30 Sept. 1927.

[69] D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 236 ff.

[70] See D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 327 ff. for an examination and discussion of the changes. See also *H.B.33*, p. 408, 25 May 1945; *H.B.34*, p. 3, 25 Oct. 1945; p. 65, 27 Sept. 1946; p. 70, 24 Oct. 1946; p. 86, 20 Dec. 1946; p. 417, 29 Sept. 1950; *H.B.35*, p. 290, 27 Feb. 1953.

Ministry and the Local Education Authority suggested that the existing premises in Cheltenham Road could not be brought up to standard and that the School should consider buying the site of the former Bishop's Palace at Redland and building a new school. However, the Local Education Authority had no money available for the purpose, and the proposal came to nothing.[71]

There was also a question of the 14 acres of playing fields which the Society had bought for the use of the School in 1910 and on which it had built a pavilion and which it had continued to rent to the School at a nominal rent of £70 per year. Now that the Local Authority had taken over the finances, the Society felt that the rent should be increased. The matter was eventually settled by the Society selling the land and building to the Corporation for £6,500 in 1952.[72]

During the war, Colston's Girls' School had suffered severe damage from enemy action, including the destruction of the Library Wing. It was not until 1957 that the School was able to consider rebuilding, and as the financial situation was difficult, the Society responded to a request from C. Cyril Clarke, Chairman of the Governors, and agreed to make a loan of £3,000.[73]

From 1963 onwards, the School Governors were faced with a very serious problem because the City was planning to reorganise education throughout Bristol on comprehensive lines. This meant that it would cease to take up free places in Colston's Girls' School and would have no use for it in its existing form. It wanted it to become a non-selective school and to draw pupils only from a limited area and not from the whole of the city. Very lengthy discussions and negotiations ensued. On 26 June 1964, the position was put to the Standing Committee by the Chairman of the Governors, the Hon. W. R. S. Bathurst, and in the course of the next year members of the Society gave a great deal of time and energy to considering what should be done. Basically, the issue was whether the School should accept the City's plan and change its character completely by agreeing to draw its pupils from a small catchment area, whether it should become an independent, fee-paying school, or whether it should cease to exist, in which case the income it drew from the Colston Trust might be applied to other educational purposes. The problem was far from simple. If the School was to become independent, it would require very considerable financial resources, and if the Society agreed to back it, then it might find itself financially involved for an unknown amount. If the Society decided not

[71] *H.B.34*, p. 100, 28 March 1947 when the Chairman of the Governors reported this to the Society. See also D. J. Eames, *op. cit.*, pp. 334 ff.

[72] *H.B.35*, p. 110, 28 Sept. 1951; p. 260, 28 Nov. 1952.

[73] *H.B.36*, p. 260, 22 Feb. 1957.

to help and the School had to close, the Merchant Venturers might be accused of betraying the School. On the other hand, if they did support it and it became clear after a few years that it was not financially viable, the Society would be even more unpopular. Some members felt that it would be unwise to give support to a new independent school at such a time. Others thought that if the Society ceased to be concerned with Colston's Girls' School, it would be withdrawing from yet another educational enterprise and that only Colston's Boys' School would be left of the many educational activities in which the Society had formerly been involved. It is not possible to follow in detail here the long-drawn-out negotiations, discussions and memoranda. The case for establishing an Independent School was pressed with great energy and, occasionally, with excessive enthusiasm by the Chairman of the Governors, the late Hon. W. R. S. Bathurst. On 23 June 1965, a General Hall decided by 31 votes to 8 that the School should not be closed and that the Society should make a grant of £6,000 a year for 7 years to help establish a new independent school. Mr. Bathurst promised a gift of £3,500 for establishing scholarships, and in July he was able to announce that he had already received gifts of over £3,600 from Old Girls and others. The Colston Trust continued to manage the lands and endowments of the school, but the management of the School was in the hands of the Governors, of whom there were 18. Ten of these were nominated by the Society, 2 by the Local Education Authority, 1 by the University and 5 were co-opted. The Society's responsibility for the future of the School is thus limited as far as its finances are concerned, but its initial gift had given Colston's Girls' School a chance to find its own feet.[74]

THE SOCIETY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

As has been seen earlier, the attempt to prevent overlapping between the work of University College, Bristol, and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College had finally broken down in 1901.[75] Early in the twentieth century a related but much more important question arose when the movement to establish a University in Bristol gathered momentum. In 1899 there had been established a University College Colston Society to raise funds to help the College, and at its first annual dinner James Bryce had spoken of the possibility of a

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[74] There are many lengthy references to all this in the Society's minutes, see *H.B.38*, p. 292, 26 June 1964; *H.B.39*, pp. 13 ff., 13 Nov. 1964; p. 21, 27 Nov. 1964; pp. 36 ff., 26 Feb. 1965; p. 40, 5 March 1965; pp. 44 ff., 25 March 1965; pp. 50 ff., 9 April 1965; p. 54, 23 April 1965; p. 69, 11 June 1965; p. 76, 25 June 1965; p. 79, 29 July 1965; p. 89, 10 Sept. 1965. For later developments, see *H.B.40*, p. 269, 28 Sept. 1971; *H.B.41*, p. 68, 9 April 1973; p. 93, 24 Sept. 1973.

[75] See pp. 381–4.

Western University. In 1901, Bishop Percival had also supported this suggestion, and in 1902 R. B. (later Viscount) Haldane had spoken of the possibility of a federal West of England University which might include University College, Bristol, the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, and the colleges at Reading, Southampton and Exeter.[76] Haldane's speech was published as a pamphlet, and although the idea of a federal university was not in the long run acceptable to University College, it had an obvious attraction for those responsible for the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, including Pope, Ward and Wertheimer.[77]

On 6 March 1906, Lewis Fry called a meeting to consider the establishment of a University Committee and announced that £30,000 had been contributed to a University endowment fund by Lord Winterstoke (£10,000), J. S. Fry (£10,000) and Sir Frederick Wills (£5,000), and on 2 July 1906 a committee to establish a University was formally set up under the chairmanship of Lewis Fry.[78] It was necessary for this committee to try to increase the endowment fund to something like £200,000 and to get the cooperation and support of the Society which had for so long been playing an important role in higher education through the Technical College.[79]

The growing strength of the movement to establish a University placed the Society in a difficult position.[80] It was extremely anxious to play an important part if a University was established, but on the other hand it took immense pride in its Technical College which was preparing students for degrees of London University and which had contributed more to higher education in some of its branches than University College, Bristol.[81] The position was further complicated by the fact that the Merchant Venturers' Technical College not only carried on a great deal of non-University teaching for full-time and part-time students, but also included a primary and secondary school. Moreover, relations with University College had recently been very difficult because of disputes about overlapping. Some of the bitterness of earlier conflicts was carried over into the discussions about founding a University.

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[76] For the origins of the University, see Basil Cottle and J. W. Sherborne, *The Life of a University*, 2nd edition, 1960, on which this paragraph is based.

[77] For Wertheimer's Memorandum on the position which the Merchant Venturers' Technical College should occupy in the proposed University, see *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1901*, p. 221, 7 Dec. 1906. This was printed for circulation among members.

[78] It is convenient henceforth to refer to this as the University Committee.

[79] Cottle and Sherborne, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–2.

[80] The Society's attitude was very largely determined by a small group in which G. H. Pope, W. W. Ward, Percy Liston King (the Treasurer) and Julius Wertheimer, Principal of the Technical College, played a decisive role. Their recommendations had, of course, to receive official approval by a General Hall. A number of papers were printed and circulated by members, but very little discussion is recorded in the *Hall Book*.

[81] I found in two black boxes in the Society's archives a large number of papers relating to the foundation of the University. They include *M.V.T.C. Reports and Memoranda 1891–1901* (which in fact goes on to 1906); five cardboard-covered files covering the years 1908–1909, and a large number of papers, drafts, printed documents. The papers have not yet been put in chronological order or given reference

The Society's representatives were determined men anxious to get the best terms they could for their Technical College if they were to cooperate. They wished to retain as much financial and administrative control as possible if part of the Technical College was to be included in the proposed University. Julius Wertheimer had obvious reasons for trying to secure for his College as important a part as possible, and he had the ear of Pope and W. W. Ward.[82] G. H. Pope seems to have been the strong man in the group, and on occasions he took an uncompromising line. As late as 11 August 1908, he wrote to Alderman W. H. Elkins, Chairman of the City's Education Committee, "Speaking for myself alone, I am sorry that . . . the question of a local University was ever mooted. It is doubtful whether the population of Bristol and its neighbourhood can supply enough undergraduates (even though half of them be women) for a University of more than duodecimo size, and there seems little reason why undergraduates should come from a distance." He went on to say that the pick of the students in the Merchant Venturers' Technical College already took London University degrees, "which are far more valuable than any local degree is likely to become . . .". He thought it would be better for the working classes if the College remained completely independent, but this could happen only if the Corporation continued, and perhaps increased, its financial support, which, he supposed, was not to be expected "during the present University mania, unless we join the movement". If the Society did so, it must do what it could "to render as innocuous as possible any Charter that may be granted".[83] W. W. Ward could also take a firm line, but the impression given by the correspondence is that he was much more sympathetic to the proposed University and more inclined to be conciliatory and to exercise some restraint on the fiery Pope. He was very anxious that the Society should remain closely involved with educational matters as this justified its existence and prevented it from being an anachronism. He thought

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numbers. For convenience, they are referred to henceforth as *M.V. University Papers.*

[82] See *M.V. University Papers, passim* for the part which he played in collecting information and suggesting the policy which should be followed.

[83] *M.V. University Papers* copy of letter from G. H. Pope to Alderman W. H. Elkins, 11 Aug. 1908.

that the creation of the University would make the Merchants' Committees more important and interesting, and he wanted younger members and new blood to be brought in to the work much more than they had been in the past. On at least one occasion, he advised giving way at a time when "George Pope would have preferred to have broken with the University people altogether and declared open war".[84]

The University Committee and the Society's Committee differed on major issues of principle, since the former wanted a unitary university with most of it on one site, whereas the latter hoped until a late stage that the University would be a federation of the two Colleges which might also include in due course other institutions in the West Country. Moreover, the Society's attitude was very paternalistic towards its own College and it was anxious to retain very considerable financial and administrative control. There was, too, a marked difference in attitudes to the teaching staff between Lloyd Morgan, the Principal of University College, and Julius Wertheimer, Principal of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College.[85] The University Committee was at times prepared to make quite unreasonable demands such as the suggestion that there should be a complete merger and that the Society should hand over to the University the property in Unity Street where the Merchant Venturers' Technical College was carrying on its work. The secondary school would not be included, but, the University Committee added optimistically, "we are led to believe that the discontinuance of the School has been under the consideration of the Society".[86] George Pope may have been unreasonable when he wrote "I am sorry that U.C.B. either cannot understand plain 'English' or will not believe that we mean what we say,"[87] but the more conciliatory Ward no doubt had some justification for his remark "It is a pity the University Committee did not originally approach the Society in a less aggressive manner", adding "However, we let byegones be byegones and said nothing to humiliate them."[88]

Negotiations were the more difficult because members of the two conflicting groups did not move in the same circles socially or politically. The money for the University came overwhelmingly from the Wills and the Fry families, who were Liberal in politics, nonconformist in religion and not members of the Society of

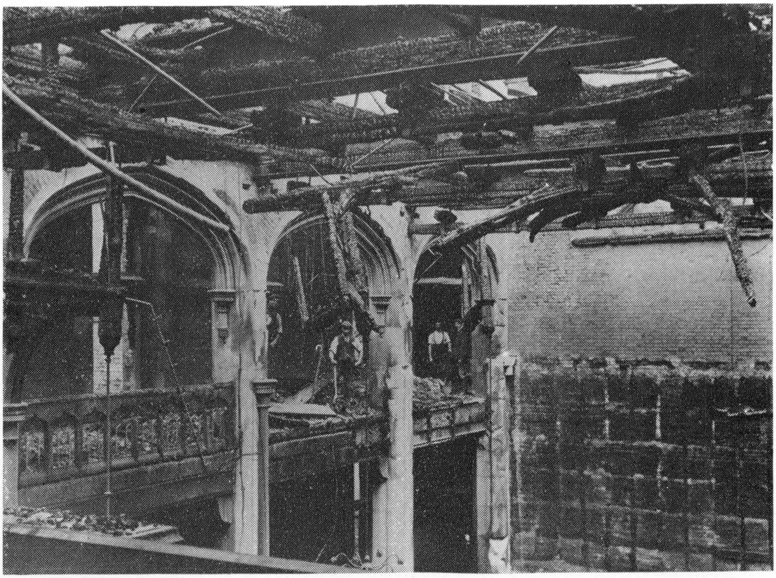
[84] *M.V. University Papers*, W. W. Ward to P. L. King, 15 May 1908; 9 April 1908; 10 March 1909.

[85] See, for example, *M.V. University Papers*, Memorandum of Wertheimer of his conversation with Lloyd Morgan, 5 April 1909, and Wertheimer to Ward, 23 March 1909.

[86] *Ibid.*, Lewis Fry to P. L. King, 24 Feb. 1908.

[87] *Ibid.*, Pope to P. L. King, 14 Feb. 1909.

[88] *Ibid.*, Ward to P. L. King, 5 June 1908.

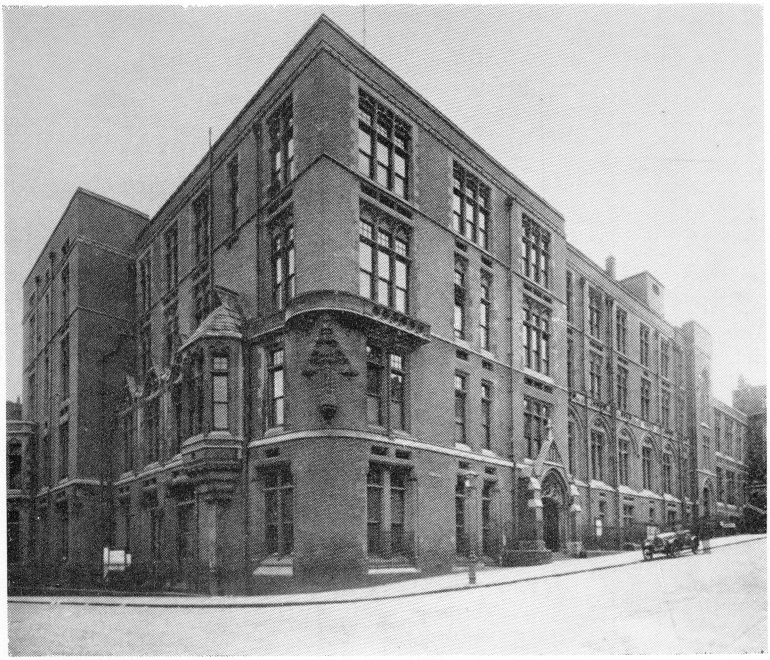


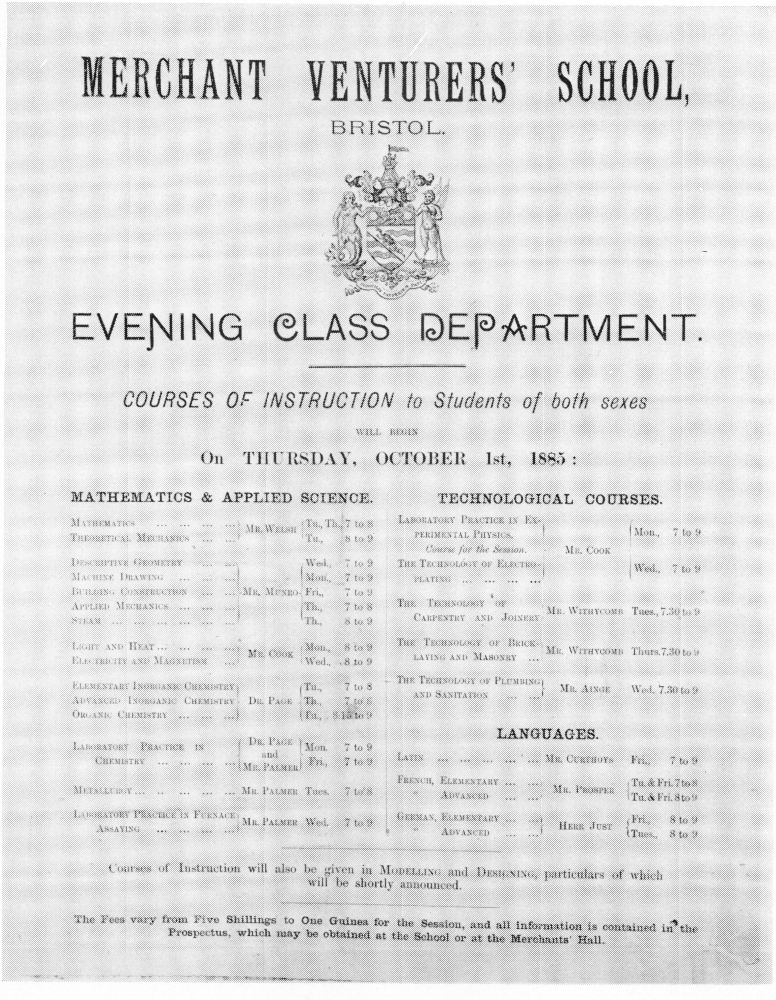
Above: The main building of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College after the fire of 9 October 1906. From a photograph in the Hall.

See p. 477. *Photograph by G. Kelsey*

Below: The Merchant Venturers' Technical College, rebuilt after the fire and opened on 24 June 1909. From a photograph in the Hall.

See p. 497. *Photograph by G. Kelsey*





MERCHANT VENTURERS' SCHOOL,

BRISTOL.

EVENING CLASS DEPARTMENT.

COURSES OF INSTRUCTION to Students of both sexes

WILL BEGIN

On THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1st, 1885:

MATHEMATICS & APPLIED SCIENCE.

Mathematics	Mr. Welsh	Tu., Th.,	7 to 8
Theoretical Mechanics		Tu.,	8 to 9
Descriptive Geometry	Mr. Munro	Wed.,	7 to 9
Machine Drawing		Mon.,	7 to 9
Building Construction		Fri.,	7 to 9
Applied Mechanics		Th.,	7 to 8
Steam		Th.,	8 to 9
Light and Heat	Mr. Cook	Mon.,	8 to 9
Electricity and Magnetism ...		Wed.,	8 to 9
Elementary Inorganic Chemistry	Dr. Page	Tu.,	7 to 8
Advanced Inorganic Chemistry		Th.,	7 to 8
Organic Chemistry		Fri.,	8.15 to 9
Laboratory Practice in Chemistry	Dr. Page and Mr. Palmer	Mon.	7 to 9
		Fri.,	7 to 9
Metallurgy	Mr. Palmer	Tues.	7 to 8
Laboratory Practice in Furnace Assaying	Mr. Palmer	Wed.	7 to 9

TECHNOLOGICAL COURSES.

Laboratory Practice in Experimental Physics. *Course for the Session.*	Mr. Cook	Mon.,	7 to 9
The Technology of Electro-plating		Wed.,	7 to 9
The Technology of Carpentry and Joinery	Mr. Withycomb	Tues.,	7.30 to 9
The Technology of Bricklaying and Masonry ...	Mr. Withycomb	Thurs.	7.30 to 9
The Technology of Plumbing and Sanitation	Mr. Ainge	Wed.	7.30 to 9

LANGUAGES.

Latin	Mr. Curthoys	Fri.,	7 to 9
French, Elementary	Mr. Prosper	Tu. & Fri.	7 to 8
" Advanced		Tu. & Fri.	8 to 9
German, Elementary	Herr Just	Fri.,	8 to 9
" Advanced		Tues.,	8 to 9

Courses of Instruction will also be given in Modelling and Designing, particulars of which will be shortly announced.

The Fees vary from Five Shillings to One Guinea for the Session, and all information is contained in the Prospectus, which may be obtained at the School or at the Merchants' Hall.

The courses for evening classes in the Merchant Venturers' School in the first session, 1885

Photograph by G. Kelsey

Merchant Venturers.[89] It is difficult to assess how important the political factor was, but George Pope certainly took it seriously and was inclined to see the wicked hand of the Liberals behind the opposition which he encountered. With reference to the semi-independent role he was demanding for the Technical College as against the totally subordinate position which University College hoped it would occupy, he remarked "Clearly they are afraid of free trade, though they are Radicals," and he thought the Merchant Venturers were at a disadvantage in negotiating with the Privy Council because they were well-known Conservatives while the main supporters of University College were Liberals, doubtless having the support of three out of the four Bristol M.P.s.[90]

In view of the major differences of principles and personalities, it is not surprising that the attempt to reconcile the interests of University College and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College led to sharp conflicts and that it was not until 1909 just before the Charter was granted that agreement was finally reached. In order to understand what was involved it is necessary to consider the matter in some detail.

On 26 October 1906, the Hall was informed that a letter had been received from the Rt. Honourable Lewis Fry, Chairman of the Executive Committee for promoting a University of Bristol, asking the Society to appoint some members to meet his Committee. The letter was referred to the same committee which had been appointed to consider what was to be done as a result of the fire which had destroyed the Merchant Venturers' Technical College.[91] Lengthy negotiations and correspondence followed between the two committees, and proposals and counter-proposals were made. Julius Wertheimer seems to have played a prominent, if not the leading, role in proposing the lines on which the Society should negotiate.[92]

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[89] Cottle and Sherborne point out that W. Proctor Baker, the prominent Merchant Venturer who had played a major role in the development of the Technical College, had contributed generously to University College in its early days and that it is unlikely that he anticipated that the two institutions would come to compete against each other (*The Life of a University*, pp. 31, 33). He might perhaps have been able to reconcile the conflicting claims or at least have worked for conciliation, but by this time he was no longer alive.

[90] *M.V. University Papers*, G. H. Pope to P. L. King, 11 June 1908; typescript document headed "The Merchant Venturers' Technical College and the University College, Bristol" with handwritten sub-title "Short history of negociation", which is almost certainly Pope's work. See also Pope's letter to P. L. King, 10 Feb. 1909, when he reports that the Privy Council is sympathetic to the Society's views and adds "Lewis Fry will be able to shelter himself from his fire-eating friends behind the P.C."

[91] *H.B.29*, p. 214, 26 Oct. 1906. For the fire, see pp. 477–8.

[92] See printed Memorandum from Wertheimer, 7 Dec. 1906, on the position which the Technical College should occupy in the proposed University and

The correspondence between 23 October 1906 and 4 February 1907 was printed for circulation to members.[93] The first shot was fired on 11 December 1906 when the Society's committee informed Lewis Fry that it would recommend to the Society approval of the formation of a University with the Merchant Venturers' Technical College forming part of it, on condition that the Society provided in its college, which was to be re-erected on the Unity Street site, such Faculties of the University as might be mutually agreed. The Society was to be adequately represented on the various governing bodies of the University, and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College was to be financially independent and autonomous with regard to internal arrangements, although subject to the University with regard to curriculum and other academic matters.

In his reply of 17 December 1906, Fry regretted that the Society did not share the view that all Faculties should be on one central site and asked for information about what Faculties the Society proposed to provide in the Unity Street premises. The reply of the Society's sub-committee on 22 December 1906 must have staggered him, for it was proposed that the Society should provide a Faculty of Applied Science including (a) Applied Chemistry, including Metallurgy, Brewing, Dyeing, etc. provided the Society considered there was sufficient demand in the West of England (b) Engineering, civil, electrical, mechanical, mining and sanitary (c) all technological subjects in so far as they came in the purview of the University (d) such other subjects as the University might allot to the Faculty and for which the Society was willing to make provision. Moreover, in order that the Merchant Venturers' Technical College might teach Applied Science, it would be necessary to teach so much Pure Science as was required to illustrate it. For full measure, when the University thought that there was sufficient demand for a Faculty of Commerce and Economics, the Merchant Venturers' Technical College was to have the right to provide it, if it were willing to do so. This was very much on the lines which Julius Wertheimer had proposed in a Memorandum of 18 December 1906,[94] and it seems that he was anxious to build up for the Society, and for himself as Principal, a large semi-private empire inside the new University.

In his reply on 26 January 1907, Fry regretted that these conditions "appear to be altogether divergent from the fundamental principles we then submitted". These were that there should be a

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another Memorandum bearing his initials of 18 Dec. 1906, both in *M.V. University Papers*.

[93] A copy was inserted after p. 245 in *H.B.29*, and there are other copies in the Society's archives.

[94] *M.V. University Papers*, 11 Feb. 1907. Not signed but clearly the work of Julius Wertheimer.

complete fusion of the two Colleges, although the name of the Society was to be specially associated with certain departments of Applied Science, such as Engineering. The appointment of the first Dean of the Faculty of Applied Science might be reserved to the Society, and it would no doubt be possible to incorporate in the Faculty members of the staff of the Technical College who were giving instruction of University character. There was to be no duplication of classes, and there was to be only one administration under the Court and Governors of the University.

There was thus fundamental disagreement. Not surprisingly, Julius Wertheimer reacted strongly against the proposal that his college should thus be swallowed up, and pointed out in a Memorandum to the Master on 11 February 1907 that neither London University nor Manchester or Sheffield required associated technological colleges to give up their autonomy. He respectfully submitted "that care should be taken that the welfare of a substantial and successful Technical College is not sacrificed in order to secure imaginary benefits for a shadowy University, the date of whose foundation is still doubtful".[95] There was a conference between the Principals of the two Colleges at Merchant's Hall on 11 February 1907 to try to sort out problems of overlapping, but it came to nothing, and at a Hall on 22 February 1907 the Master recommended to the 29 Members present that, as it was improbable that the proposed University could be formed for some years, the Society should forthwith rebuild its College on its present site, not only to prevent a further loss of students but because it was essential to the negotiations for coordinating the work of University College and the Technical College. Although Mervyn King objected that any business man would want to see a scheme and a financial statement first, the Hall decided to proceed forthwith. It would clearly be in a much stronger position in relation to the proposed University once it had rebuilt its College. There was no immediate danger of the University being established and in view of the small amount so far raised, there was no likelihood of it being set up without the full cooperation of the Society.[96] In March 1907, the Treasurer wrote expressing his committee's disappointment at the failure of negotiations, and they were not resumed until February 1908. Meanwhile, the Society went ahead rapidly with rebuilding its Technical College.[97]

Until early in 1908, the Society had been negotiating from strength, since its College was essential to the foundation of a University. The balance of power changed dramatically when at the University Colston Society's Dinner on 14 February 1908 a letter was read from Henry Overton Wills promising £100,000 towards the endowment fund, provided a charter was granted within two years. In the course of the dinner, there were five other donations amounting to £16,000 in all, and the total endowment fund was then about £150,000.[98] The University Committee was now seriously in business, and the cooperation of the Society, although still very desirable, was no longer absolutely essential.

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[95] *Ibid.*, P. L. King to Professor Cowl, University College.

[96] *H.B.29*, pp. 242 ff., 246, 22 Feb. 1907.

[97] See p. 478.

The University Committee now took the initiative in resuming negotiations, and on 6 February 1908 it wrote to the Treasurer asking, "now that circumstances are perhaps somewhat altered", whether the Society would resume negotiations.[99] The Treasurer replied that the Society was "in full sympathy . . . as regards the foundation of a University" and would like to know the proposed constitution and the position of the Technical College in it.[100] W. W. Ward wrote at this time that he had been studying the constitution of the University of London, which had 23 institutions, all financially independent, and which could remain so as long as the University considered them efficient. He thought that there had been a good deal of misconception between the two committees in the past for want of accurate information on either side. He felt that the Society ought in every way to show its goodwill towards the University scheme but gave a warning ". . . I hope a body like the S.M.V. will not be carried off its legs by the glamour of the £100,000 gift, and rashly consent to throw into the melting pot such a proved success as its school, for the sake of a scheme which for many years must be experimental, however magnificent it may be." He remarked "We can always throw in our lot with the University afterwards, as I see University College, London, has now done with the University of London."[101]

Fry replied on 24 February 1908 that what was intended was no novelty but a University on the lines of Birmingham, Liverpool and Sheffield. Curricula and discipline would be under the Senate. There would be a Council and a Court, and probably four Faculties – Arts, Medicine, Science and Applied Science. With reference to the Technical College, it was suggested that the Society should merge its contribution in the University, but what was to happen would depend on the extent to which the Society was prepared to cooperate with the University. The overriding principle was "the complete unification of the work of the University under one administration and control". If the two Colleges merged, all adult education and instruction would come under the University scheme. The Merchant Venturers' Secondary School in the Technical College would necessarily be excluded. The higher work in Science and Applied Science in the two institutions would be completely merged in the University. Some of it would go into the Faculty of Science in University College; the greater part would come under the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering with which the name of the Society should be associated. It was suggested that the work of this Faculty should be carried on, so far as space permitted, in the Society's building in Unity Street which, it was proposed, should be transferred to the University, whose property it would become. With regard to the technological instruction of artisans, it was suggested that a Merchant Venturers' School of Technology should be formed in closest connection with the University, which would extend the work of the Society in this field. This should come under the management of a committee of the University, the Merchant Venturers, the City Council and coopted members from the employers and of the Trades Council. It would be subject to University statutes.[102]

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[98] Cottle and Sherborne, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[99] *M.V. University Papers*, Richard Cowl to Percy King, 6 Feb. 1908.

[100] *Ibid.*, King to Cowl, 12 Feb. 1908.

[101] *Ibid.*, Ward to Mervyn (King), 13 Feb. 1908.

It seems clear that Fry's Committee, with £150,000 behind it, was now negotiating from strength and not making much effort to take into consideration the concern of the Society for its Technical College, which was to be swallowed up ruthlessly. W. W. Ward very reasonably asked if there was any reason to think that the Technical College's training of artisans and future captains of industry would gain under the University scheme. Fry was quoting the examples of Birmingham, Liverpool and Sheffield, but made no mention of the very different constitution of London and Manchester. His proposals would reduce the educational role of the Society to "a mere financial contribution", with no real control. So long as the Society was responsible for the management of its Technical College, it had something concrete and tangible to which it could point as its work and justification. He added characteristically "I do not for a moment think that the framers of these proposals were actuated by any hostile feelings towards the Society but I cannot imagine any more insidious attack against the Society than the attempt to persuade it to give up its education work and reputation."[103]

In April 1908 the Society finally informed the University Committee that the proposals were unacceptable. Fry's committee regretted that the Society could not adopt the Scheme, recognised the friendly attitude towards the foundation of a University, and said "we shall hope when the Charter has been obtained that some way may be found of determining the relation of your College to the University in a satisfactory manner". There was a sting in the tail, for Fry added that he was sending the correspondence to the Corporation and felt sure the Society would not object.[104] The University Committee had in effect broken off negotiations and was prepared to act alone. Moreover, it was making the dispute public by informing the Corporation.

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[102] *Ibid.*, Fry to King, 24 Feb. 1908 (printed).

[103] *Ibid.*, Ward to the Master, March 1908.

At this point the Society's committee drew up a statement of its case for public consumption. G. H. Pope thought that this was necessary because Fry's committee had sent copies of the correspondence to the Corporation, adding "even if this had not been done this Committee and the U.C.B. have been expounding their views to the world at large for a considerable time".[105] A printed copy of this document entitled *The Society of Merchant Venturers and the proposed University of Bristol and the West of England* is to be found in the Society's archives.[106] The statement pointed out that Universities established in recent years had been constituted either by two colleges creating a new institution in the government of which they both took part and which supervised their work without controlling their internal affairs, or by two or more colleges merging and ending their independent existence. The first method, a federal scheme, had been first suggested by the Bishop of Bristol when he expressed the hope that some day University College and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College would "as sister Colleges form the first constituents of a University of Bristol". The idea had been developed by R. B. Haldane who suggested the models of London and Manchester for a "Bristol and West of England University" which might justify its name by including suitable institutions in Gloucestershire, Somerest, Wiltshire, Devon and Cornwall "instead of relying solely on the comparatively small population of Bristol and the neighbourhood". The document then outlined the arrangements in the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, which included a Secondary School, adult day classes for higher branches of applied science and technology, and evening classes for the technical instruction of artisans and for commercial education. It then referred to Fry's proposals which would exclude the Secondary School and require the Society to hand over Unity Street and the higher-level work in applied sciences and engineering to the University, with the provision that a School of Technology should be formed under a composite committee for the technological instruction for artisans hitherto given in the Technical College's evening classes. The Society was to be asked to make financial contributions to both the Faculty of Applied Science and to the School of Technology. To this the Society replied that its secondary school was needed, and that to transfer it to a new site would cost £28,000, apart from £500 a year to maintain it; that the present technical classes were very satisfactory, and what was proposed instead was an untried plan. The suggestion that the Society should finance both the Faculty and the School of Technology was based on a misconception of its finances. The Society argued that if there were no Merchant Venturers' Technical College in existence but only a technical college with a different origin and a different connection, and if a Scheme of University Education were being formulated on a blank sheet, then the apparent simplicity of administration proposed might have an irresistible attraction. As things were, "an Institution like the Merchant Venturers' Technical College has a record and traditions among the working classes which form an educational asset of no ordinary value. . . . The substance of a proved success should not be lightly dropped." The Society had asked itself which method was best for the artisans and future Captains of Industry in Bristol and how it could combine the maximum assistance to the new University with the minimum disturbance of its educational work among the industrial and commercial classes. It was willing to submit to University control over University teaching and to continue its other work. It would help the University by undertaking the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering. It denied that this led to overlapping and claimed that a full enquiry some ten years ago had shown such charges were unfounded.

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[104] *Ibid.*, Fry to King, 10 April 1908. [105] *Ibid.*, Pope to King, 16 May 1908.

[106] For Wertheimer's amendments to the original draft, see *ibid.*, Pope to King, 18 May 1908. See also Ward's letter of 18 May 1908 in which he advised waiting but said he would like to secure the goodwill of the papers most read by the working classes. He also suggested that the quotation marks in the words "University Committee" might be dropped, as there seemed to be something a little depreciatory in using them. For the Society's manifesto, see *Western Daily Press*, 20 May 1908, and the paper's comments on 12 Aug. 1908.

At this point, the City, which had received copies of the correspondence and which had set up a committee to consider financial help to the proposed University, intervened in the dispute, and the Lord Mayor wrote to the Master suggesting that the two bodies should meet to try to overcome the difficulties. "It appears evident to me", he said, "that the welding together of your two institutions into one, to be known as the Bristol University, would tend to the development of education and the furtherance of our City's interest in the future."[107] His committee would want to be satisfied that everything had been done to get agreement or, if that was impossible, that the Council would not have to make unnecessary duplicate grants.[108] The Society's committee was at first unwilling to agree to a joint meeting,[109] but then it changed its mind and a meeting took

[107] *Ibid.*, The Lord Mayor to the Master, 18 May 1908.

[108] *Ibid.*, The Lord Mayor to P. L. King, 22 May 1908.

[109] *Ibid.*, The Town Clerk to P. L. King, 28 May 1908.

place on 4 June.[110] On 4 June, W. W. Ward reported that the meeting had gone well. The Bishop of Bristol had been spokesman for the University Committee and had been most conciliatory in spirit and in language, as had been Lewis Fry. It had been decided that the property of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College should remain in the Society. The Bishop's written statement, however, was unsatisfactory, and W. W. Ward wrote to him, saying that there was no prospect of agreement unless the Society's main points were met. George Pope commented that if it were not "speaking evil of dignities," he would say that the Bishop's proposals were impudent and that he wanted the Society to spend largely in helping the University while getting absolutely nothing in return. It was essential in order to protect the Society's pocket that there should be coordination between the Faculty of Technology and the Technical College.[111]

Thus agreement had not been reached, and as the University Committee got near the point when it could petition for a Charter, the Society took steps to ensure that it would be treated by the Privy Council as a separate institution with the right to take part in negotiations over the proposed Charter. When Edward VII visited Bristol on 9 July 1908, the University Committee presented a Loyal Address expressing the hope that Bristol would shortly be in a position to ask for a Royal Charter for a University,[112] but the Society also staked its claim in a Loyal Address, saying that it "aspires to cooperate, and by undertaking the Faculty of Engineering of the University to lighten the labours of those who seek to diffuse the love of letters and the spirit of scientific research".[113] When the University Committee presented its petition for a Charter a little later, the Society likewise presented a petition on 6 August 1908,[114] the purpose of which was not to primarily support the request for a Charter but to ensure that the Society had a standing with the Privy Council and the right to express its own point of view.

The petition which the Society presented to the Privy Council is a long document and only some of its points can be noted here. It outlined the achievements of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and said that if a University were incorporated in such a way as to contract the resources or diminish the sphere of the Technical College, it would be detrimental to the educational facilities of Bristol and would in particular "prejudice the poorer classes" and so it was on these grounds that the petitioners were opposed to the

[110] *Ibid.*, W. W. Ward to P. L. King, 5 June 1908.

[111] *Ibid.*, George Pope to P. L. King, 11 June 1908.

[112] B. Cottle and J. W. Sherborne, *The Life of a University*, 2nd edition, p. 37.

[113] *H.B.29*, p. 312, 24 July 1908.

[114] *H.B.29*, p. 315, 24 July 1908; p. 319, 25 Sept. 1908.

scheme propounded by University College, Bristol. They feared that it would have the effect of "overshadowing and to a large extent of destroying the prestige of the Technical College". Not only would this be a poor reward for the services they had rendered to education at a time when the importance of technical education in Bristol was little recognised and ill-provided for, but it would be a fatal blow to technical education, since a University would not supply at such low fees the courses available to the artisans and poorer classes at the Technical College. Instead of the proposed scheme, they suggested the incorporation in one University of the Technical College and University College. The University would control the teaching at large, but each institution would manage its own affairs. They claimed that "If a University were founded on these lines with some such title as the Bristol and West of England University, it would have the advantage of elasticity and would be able from time to time to open its arms and embrace any institution in the West of England which might desire to obtain the advantage of becoming a member of a great University." They said they had made every effort to come to terms with University College, but all negotiations had failed because University College would not agree to the terms which they deemed essential. They explained at length what they considered necessary, but the basic point is that they wanted a federal university formed by the union of two Colleges, over one of which they were to retain complete financial and administrative control, apart from academic matters, which were to come under the University.[115]

Further discussion followed with the University Committee which met the Society on a number of points and expressed the hope that it would now obtain its hearty goodwill and support. If it did not obtain it, then it reserved the right to withdraw absolutely and to be free to proceed as it liked.[116] On 24 October, the University Committee pressed the Society to communicate its amendments early in November, as it was imperative that the proposed Charter be tabled in the House of Commons early in the month.[117] The Society's proposed amendments were presented on 10 November, and on 13 November the University Committee expressed disappointment that they were not acceptable.[118]

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[115] See *M.V. University Papers* for the Petition. Pope informed the Clerk of the Privy Council on 1 August 1908 that not only had no agreement been reached but many points had not been discussed at all and that all matters at issue ought to be settled before a Charter was granted.

[116] *Ibid.*, Benson, Carpenter, Cross and Williams, solicitors to the University, to the Society, 19 Oct. 1908.

[117] *Ibid.*, same to same, 24 Oct. 1908.

[118] *Ibid.*, printed answer of the Society, 10 Nov. 1908 and University Committee's letter of 13 November 1908.

The battle now shifted to London. The draft charter was tabled in both Houses on 17 November, and it did not incorporate the Merchant Venturers' Technical College. The Society's parliamentary agent called at the Privy Council Office to find out why the Charter had been tabled without the Merchant Venturers' petition being first considered. An official there expressed surprise that the Society did not know what was going on, since he had had numerous interviews and communications with representatives of the University Committee and had on 5 November received a statement in two columns from the Committee's solicitor setting out the requirements of the Society and what the University Committee had agreed to. He thought that in effect practically all the suggestions of the Society had been accepted.[119]

Fear that the Society's case was going by default led to a reaction on the part of one of the Society's negotiators which is in many ways typical of the atmosphere of distrust and lack of communication between those concerned. A memorandum in the Society's archives noted "From this it appeared that, while the University Committee were carrying on negotiations with the Merchant Venturers by means of documents marked 'Private', they, or their agents, had been in frequent communication with the Privy Council Office, behind the Society's back and had led the official to believe that the promoters of the University had practically come to terms with the Society, which is very far from being the case. It must be assumed that the advancement of the petition of the University College . . . had been obtained by this underhand dealing and by the misrepresentations made."[120] The Society's negotiators considered having questions asked in the House about the failure of the Privy Council Office to examine its petition, and they also sought support from the Board of Education.[121] Pope and W. W. Ward then obtained an interview with A. F. Fitzroy "the chief man at the P.C.". They handed their draft agreement to him and went through the disputed points. Fitzroy drafted clauses which Pope and Ward thought would be acceptable to the Society. He also informed them that he had been very frank with the other side and had told one of its representatives that some of his letters were unnecessarily rude and that the promoters of the University were suspicious both of the Society and of the citizens of Bristol. He had pointed out that the University Committee's position was very different from that of the

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[119] *Ibid.*, Meredith & Co. to Osborne, Ward and Vassall & Co., 23 Nov. 1908.

[120] *Ibid.*, unsigned typescript headed "The Merchant Venturers' Technical College and The University College, Bristol", 8 Dec. 1908, probably the work of George Pope.

[121] *Ibid.*, typescript "Questions intended at one time to be put in the House", 8 Dec. 1908; letters from the Board of Education to George Pope, 7 Dec., 8 Dec., 10 Dec., 21 Dec. 1908.

Society, since the committee had to do as the Privy Council told it, whereas the Society was independent. The clerk in the Privy Council Office who was responisble for the details was very amusing about the clauses (in the draft charter) which he had altered as being ungrammatical. Pope and Ward then went on to the Education Office and were told in confidence that "the proceedings had been conducted in a most mysterious and unusual manner" and that the Society would probably never know what had been going on to make the Privy Council act contrary to precedent. Ward thought that the University Committee had attempted to rush the Charter through and that the attempt had nearly succeeded.[122] Pope was very pleased with the interview at the Privy Council Office and the assurance that any agreement they came to with the University Committee would be scheduled to the Charter, but he thought that the Board of Education's Secondary School Branch was "either unable or unwilling to get into its stupid and obstinate head the fact that our Secondary School is not an independent institution".[123] On 22 December he wrote to the Treasurer saying that he had sent to Fitzroy the draft agreement as amended by him and that Fitzroy thought the document afforded a reasonable basis for agreement. He thought that unless the University Committee accepted it at once and unreservedly, it might be as well to send it to the newspapers. He understood that people were accusing the Society of delaying the Charter and that they ought to know that "it is we, and not U.C.B., who have made a strong point of low fees for artisans".[124]

In the course of January and February 1909 various draft agreements circulated between the University Committee, the Society and the Privy Council Office.[125] On 9 February, the Society was insisting as one of the conditions that it should have predominance on the Board of the Faculty of Engineering, for the provision and maintenance of which it offered to make itself responsible, and that the interests of the artisans, who were the primary object of the Society's care, should not be prejudiced by the proposed arrangements.[126] On 16 February, the Society received from Fitzroy a schedule of agreement which was a compromise between the two views. Pope sent it to Wertheimer to be copied and then discussed it with him. There were several points which needed attention and which could be settled without much difficulty, "and there is one which will cause more difficulty, but which we ought, I think, to insist on even to the point of breaking off negotiations. I mean the securing for ourselves of virtual independence in our own Faculty." He said that he had put this to Fitzroy as plainly as he thought prudent to do in writing and if necessary he would seek another interview and put it still more plainly by word of mouth. He added "Quite apart from the fact that we shall pay the piper and have a right to be secure from interference so long as we teach, and teach well, everything that the University authorities demand, there are reasons which cannot be put on paper but which you and I know, why practical independence will be essential to smooth working – such things as the long-standing jealousy of our College on the part of U.C.B. and the dislike and jealousy of W(ertheimer) which is felt in that quarter." The alterations made by the Privy Council Office had taken away this independence. The Society's original wording must be restored, and he thought that if the Society stood firm, the Privy Council would give in. He went on to say "I shall point out to Fitzroy, as Sir Edward Grey lately pointed out to Austria–Hungary, that a treaty cannot be modified without the consent of *all* parties."[127]

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[122] *Ibid.*, Ward to King, 11 Dec. 1908.
[123] *Ibid.*, Pope to King, 12 Dec. 1908.
[124] *Ibid.*, Pope to King, 22 Dec. 1908.
[125] *Ibid.*, January 1909.
[126] *Ibid.*, the Society to the University's solicitors, 9 Feb. 1909.

Pope was sure that all that was necessary was to stand firm, and he requested another interview with Fitzroy. The reply on 1 March was devastating. Fitzroy would be happy to see him but, he went on, ". . . I do not anticipate any very fruitful result unless you are prepared to modify materially the attitude indicated in your official letter". He was provoked into adding in terms not characteristic of the civil service the comment "After a very considerable experience of negotiations in connection with University Charters, I am free to confess that I have never had to deal with a body of gentlemen whose disposition was so fluctuating and mistrustful. You have been met in a way which amounts to a very handsome recognition of your special claims and all you do is to raise fresh points and extend your pretensions to matters lying outside the purpose of the agreement."[128]

In a long letter to the Treasurer, Pope remained convinced of the righteousness of his cause. He thought the letter "astounding and preposterous", adding "I suppose he is writing under political direction, but even so he need not have wandered so widely from the truth". He thought that probably Fitzroy had never before had a case in which a body of independent gentlemen had offered very large help to a University without asking for anything in return, beyond the privilege of making their help really efficient. The real point at issue now was "whether we should be allowed to make our Faculty a success. We have promised to teach everything the University requires but we shall not be permitted to teach the amount of chemistry which is taught elsewhere, which is undoubtedly necessary and for which we have made special provision." He was of the opinion that "they fear we shall encroach on the Faculty of Science" and that "They wish to strangle our one Faculty in order to avoid an imaginary danger to one of their several Faculties". He hoped the Society would stand firm. If the University refused the Society's offer, its loss would be a gain to Technical Education and to "our special clients the industrial classes, some of whose most influential leaders are of the opinion that the University will be of little or no use to them, but fully appreciate the benefits of our College and are prepared to support it. Without the conditions we have imposed, it would be madness to enter into partnership with people who do not want us, who have long been jealous of us, who positively hate Wertheimer, who ask us to take over as his subordinates teachers from University College imbued, of course, with the same sentiments and whom we cannot trust in view of the way in which secretly they lied, or allowed lies to be told, to the Privy Council and so managed to steal a march upon us." He asked what line he and Ward should take, and he suggested sounding the negotiators and other influential members of the Society.[129]

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[127] *Ibid.*, Pope to King, 18 Feb. 1909.

[128] *Ibid.*, A. W. Fitzroy, Privy Council Office, 1 March 1909.

A major issue at this point was whether the Engineering Faculty should be allowed to teach Chemical Engineering, as this might infringe on the work of the Faculty of Pure Science. Unlike Pope, neither Ward nor Wertheimer was willing to break off negotiations on this issue.[130]

There still remained a number of questions relating to the financing of the Engineering Department and to the conditions of employment of the staff of University College who were to be transferred to the new Faculty of Engineering in Unity Street, and discussions continued on these points in March, April and May. Wertheimer had a low opinion of some of the engineers in University College. He pointed out that Professor Ferrier did only 12 hours teaching a week. He agreed that professors should have some time for research, provided the official time thus assigned was used for the purpose in question but, he remarked acidly, "I do not remember hearing that Ferrier has done any research work in recent years, but it is possible that this is the case."[131] He was anxious to exercise control over Ferrier and resisted the view that he should hold a position independent of the Society in administration and finance, arguing that teachers in the Faculty of Engineering would be provided and paid by the Society and should be responsible to the Society through the Principal of their College in the first instance. When the staff of University College came to the Technical College, there must not be an enormous difference between their load and the load of the lecturers in the College, and their vacations must be the same.[132]

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[129] *Ibid.*, Pope to King, 2 March 1909.

[130] *Ibid.*, Ward to King, 10 March 1909; Wertheimer to Ward, 11 March 1909.

[131] *Ibid.*, Wertheimer to Ward, 23 March 1909.

At the end of March, Ward reported on a long interview he had had with the Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council concerning these issues. He remarked that "They are naturally getting sick of the whole thing and rather take the line that this is a small matter which the University will deal with . . .". Ward said it was serious and that he took his full share of the blame for not having raised it before. He thought that throughout the negotiations, the other side had the disposition to bang the door. Hitherto the Society had been pretty successful in forcing it open, but now, he thought, it was quite possible that there would be impatience at delay and a disinclination to discuss the question.[133]

The Society's negotiators continued to bargain to the very last, and a compromise solution was worked out by which the supervision of the Principal over the Departments in the Faculty was not to imply any direct interference with the manner and method of conducting academic work.[134] The Privy Council Office was getting impatient and wrote to Pope on 21 March saying that it had sent six copies of the Charter and the amended schedule concerning the Technical College to Ward on 8 March but had heard nothing definite about whether the Society had any further observations to make. It asked him to answer in writing, as time was going on.[135] The Society's negotiators made one more effort to get some alterations, but the University Committee stated that it could not accept them at this stage.[136] On 6 May 1909, a General Hall approved the terms of the agreement,[137] and on 17 May the Privy Council Office informed the Society that the King had approved the Charter.[138] On 24 September, the Society put its seal on the formal agreement with the University to provide a Faculty of Engineering.[139]

Towards the end of the long-drawn-out negotiations which had delayed for so long the foundation of the University, W. W. Ward wrote to the Treasurer "As regards the future, it seems to me to be in a nutshell! If the Council of the University are reasonable, no difficulty will arise – if they are unreasonable and try and bleed us we shall part company. We must give them a little time to show their disposition."[140] As it turned out, relations became remarkably harmonious in the years that followed. The fact that the Society provided a home and financial aid to the Faculty of Engineering and that under the agreement it had three representatives on the Council and ten on the Court of the University meant a very close relationship. There were now the personal contacts which had been so notably absent before, and this, no doubt, helped to ensure friendly cooperation. It was significant that in 1919 the Society conferred honorary membership on the Rt. Hon. Lewis Fry for his services to Bristol as an M.P. and for "the courtesy and ability with which as one of the Founders of the University of Bristol he assisted in the settlement of the agreement between the Society and the University",[141] and it was symbolic of the friendly relations that had been established that for the royal visit of 1925 the Society lent the University a table, tablecloth and chairs for the royal table at the luncheon in the Victoria Rooms.[142]

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[132] *Ibid.*, Memorandum of Wertheimer's conversations with Lloyd Morgan, 5 April 1909; "J.W's Suggestions", undated but after 15 March 1909; correspondence of Ward and Fry, 12 March–1 April 1909; Wertheimer to Ward, 29 March 1909.

[133] *Ibid.*, Ward to King, 31 March 1909.

[134] *Ibid.*, 24 April 1909.

[135] *Ibid.*, Fitzroy to Pope, 21 April 1909.

[136] *Ibid.*, King to Ward, 3 May 1909; Benson, Carpenter, Cross & Co. (University's solicitors) to the Society, 4 May 1909.

[137] *H.B.29*, p. 358, 6 May 1909.

[138] *M.V. University Papers*, Fitzroy to the Society, 6 May 1909.

[139] *H.B.29*, p. 372, 24 Sept. 1909.

The arrangements between the Society and the University were reviewed from time to time,[143] and in 1928 a joint committee recommended that the liability of the Society for contributing to the maintenance of the Faculty of Engineering should be three-quarters of the income of the Society's Education Trust and that the Education Trust should continue until 1940, during which time the Society agreed to give the Faculty fixity of tenure. The Vice-Chancellor and two members of the Finance Committee were to be on the Management Committee of the Technical College. The Society put its seal to the agreement in June 1929.[144]

During the years in which the Faculty of Engineering was situated in the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, the Society was able to help the University in a number of ways. In 1919, for example, it agreed to sell to it Manor House, Richmond House, Clifton Place and Rivers Cottage for use as students' hostels;[145] it contributed to the fund raised for establishing a Faculty of Law;[146] in 1946 it agreed to provide £2,500 over seven years for University Halls of Residence;[147] and in 1947 gave two shields for athletics.[148]

Discussions were going on from 1944 about what was to happen when the agreement between the Society and the University ended in 1950, and both the Society and the University were anxious to maintain a close relationship.[149] The Society was in any case required to hand over its responsibility for technical education to the City, and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College was due to be taken over by the Corporation in 1949.[150] Arrangements were made by which the Faculty of Engineering could continue to occupy the Unity Street premises until its new home in the Queen's Building was ready for occupation, and the Society agreed to give the University £1,000 for seven years from 1949 to be used for undergraduate scholarships and other purposes. The University agreed to continue to allot 10 seats on Court and 3 on Council to members of the Society.

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[140] *M.V. University Papers*, Ward to King, 17 April 1909.

[141] *H.B.30*, p. 418, 1 Feb. 1919.

[142] *H.B.31*, p. 285, 24 April 1925.

[143] *H.B.31*, p. 5, 30 May 1919 agreement with the University concerning the tenure of office of the Professor in the Faculty of Engineering; p. 150; 28 April 1922; Committee to meet the University Committee to consider what alterations if any should be made in the agreement concerning the Faculty of Engineering; *H.B.31*, p. 432, 23 March 1928, another committee for the same purpose.

[144] *H.B.32*, p. 27, 30 Nov. 1928; p. 60, 28 June 1929.

[145] *H.B.31*, p. 11, 25 July 1919.

[146] *H.B.32*, p. 248, 23 Dec. 1932.

[147] *H.B.34*, p. 54, 28 June 1946.

[148] *H.B.34*, p. 116, 24 July 1947.

After a stormy beginning, relations between the Society and the University had been remarkably harmonious and fruitful, and at the Vice-Chancellors' suggestion a tablet was placed in the foyer of the Queen's Building commemorating the pioneer work of the Society in providing a Faculty of Engineering. It was appropriately unveiled in 1954 by the Chancellor of the University, Sir Winston Churchill, who was an honorary member of the Society of Merchant Venturers.[151]

OTHER EDUCATIONAL INTERESTS

In addition to its work in connection with educational institutions with which it had a direct connection, the Society has throughout the period made a steady stream of donations to other schools and to individuals who needed help. Some of these may be noted.

In 1902, for example, it gave £500 towards the cost of a new Nautical School at Portishead which was to replace the old *Formidable* training ship[152] and next year £10 was donated towards the repair of St. Andrew's Church School.[153] In 1906, £50 was donated to help build a Sunday School in a new part of Bedminster and £20 to help pay off the debt on the parish school of St. Augustine's.[154] Ten guineas was given for the repair of St. Jude's school in 1910 and 50 guineas to assist in alterations in the Royal West of England

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[149] *H.B.33*, p. 347, 31 March 1944; p. 356, 30 June 1944; *H.B.34*, p. 282, 27 May 1949; pp. 288 ff., 24 June 1949.

[150] *H.B.34*, p. 283, 27 May 1949; pp. 288 ff., 24 June 1949; p. 390, 23 June 1950; pp. 400 ff., 20 July 1950; *H.B.35*, p. 44, 20 Jan. 1951; p. 54, 23 Feb. 1951; p. 80, 25 May 1951.

[151] *H.B.35*, p. 310, 29 May 1953; B. Cottle and J. W. Sherborne, *The Life of a University*, p. 84. The arrangement by which the Society gives the University £1,000 a year was renewed for 7 years in 1972 (*H.B.41*, p. 17, 27 April 1972).

[152] *H.B.29*, p. 13, 26 July 1902.

[153] *H.B.29*, p. 72, 27 Nov. 1903.

[154] *H.B.29*, p. 180, 23 Feb. 1906; p. 200, 22 June 1906.

Academy in 1913.[155] St. Augustine's Hotwells Mothers' School received £5 in 1914.[156] Gifts between the Wars included £50 to Bristol Cathedral School in 1921 and again in 1922; £21 for extraordinary repairs at Clifton Parish National School in 1924; 50 guineas for buildings for Clifton High School in 1925 and £100 to the fund for Redcliffe Day School in 1927; 100 guineas for a building fund for St. Brandon's Clergy Daughters School in 1934, and 25 guineas to Temple Colston School in 1937.[157] In 1938, in response to the appeal of Mr. Foster G. Robinson, it was agreed to contribute £1,000 over two years to help provide a fund of £18,000 in order to adapt Redcliffe Endowed School to the requirements of the Board of Education.[158]

In 1940, another member, Mr. Victor Fuller Eberle, appealed to the Society for help in connection with Clifton College. He pointed out that many parents who would normally have sent their children to Public Schools were in difficulties owing to higher taxation and that some City Companies and Livery Companies had already established association with various schools. The Society agreed to give £150 a year for seven years to establish Merchant Venturers Bursaries.[159]

Donations after World War II included 25 guineas each to Badminton School Appeal and Clifton High School Appeal in 1955; a seven-year covenant to give £100 a year to Clifton College in 1957; 200 guineas to the Bristol Grammar School Appeal in 1958; and a covenant to give £1,000 a year over seven years in response to the Clifton College Centenary Appeal in the same year. In 1961 Bristol Cathedral School was given 250 guineas to help provide a new gymnasium, and next year the Society contributed 100 guineas to Redland High School Appeal. In 1963 £100 was donated to the Bath and Wells Diocesan Girls' School Appeal, and in 1964 £250 to Clifton High School Appeal. In 1964, the Society covenanted to give £100 a year for seven years to St. Mary Redcliffe Church School, and in 1969 it agreed to contribute £1,000 to Bristol Grammar School Appeal.[160] In 1971, it gave £100 a year for 5 years to Clifton College Development Fund and also presented dolphin candlesticks to the University of Bath [161]

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[155] *H.B.29*, p. 394, 25 Feb. 1910; *H.B.30*, p. 120, 20 June 1913.

[156] *H.B.30*, p. 190, 30 Oct. 1914.

[157] *H.B.31*, p. 114, 17 June 1921; p. 157, 26 May 1922; p. 246, 25 July 1924; p. 307, 30 Oct. 1925; p. 417, 23 Dec. 1927; *H.B.32*, p. 323, 25 May 1934; p. 48, 25 June 1937; p. 50, 22 July 1937.

[158] *H.B.33*, p. 73, 26 Jan. 1938.

[159] *H.B.38*, p. 174, 24 Jan. 1940.

[160] *H.B.36*, p. 99, 24 June 1955; *H.B.37*, p. 64, 28 Feb. 1958; *H.B.37*, p. 99, 24 July 1958; *H.B.38*, p. 50, 26 May 1961; p. 137, 29 June 1962; p. 248, 29 Nov. 1963; p. 298, 30 July 1964; *H.B.39*, p. 24, 18 Dec. 1914; *H.B.40*, p. 134, 21 March 1969.

[161] *H.B.40*, p. 235, 12 Feb. 1971; p. 273, 15 Oct. 1971.

Other institutions apart from Schools also received help. In 1962, the Society agreed to give £100 to the English Speaking Union to enable sixth form boys and girls to be sent to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1963, and in the same year 50 guineas was given to the Bristol Folkhouse and to the Lord Mayor's Appeal to help provide hostels in Bristol for overseas students.[162]

Because of its great interest in the University of Bristol, the Society was ready to respond to a University Appeal in 1962 by agreeing to contribute £500 a year for seven years[163] and it had earlier agreed that the income from the Wertheimer Trust of about £450 a year could be used by agreement with the University to provide entrance scholarships.[164]

From all this it will be clear that the Society, which had first become involved in education in a very small way in the early seventeenth century, reached a peak as far as educational interest was concerned in the twentieth century when it was involved not only with Colston's Boys' School and Colston's Girls' School but with that unique institution, The Merchant Venturers' Technical College. It was inevitable with the ever-increasing cost of education and the growing control exercised over it by the government and the local authorities that a private Society with limited funds should gradually cease to play quite so important a role as the century went on, but the pioneer work of the Society was of immense value, nor must it be forgotten that the contribution was not merely financial. The Society and its numerous committees gave a great deal of time to considering educational issues and many of its individual members devoted their energy and powers of leadership to the Governing Bodies on which they served.

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[162] *H.B.38*, p. 127, 25 April 1962; p. 137, 29 June 1962; p. 141, 26 July 1962.

[163] *H.B.38*, p. 149, 28 Sept. 1962.

[164] *H.B.37*, p. 111, 30 Oct. 1958.

CHAPTER 26

The Charitable Work of the Society in the Twentieth Century

IF in the course of the twentieth century the Society's direct involvement in education underwent some diminution when the Merchant Venturers' Technical College came to an end, its charitable work was greatly increased. It continued to manage various trusts, to be responsible for almshouses and to make a great number of donations from its corporate funds, but in addition it also agreed to take over the management of the very large sums given by H. H. Wills for the establishment of The St. Monica Home of Rest. This trust resembled in some ways the Colston trust for which the Society had first assumed responsibility in the early eighteenth century, but it was on a scale vastly exceeding anything which the Society had handled before, and it will be examined first before considering the other very miscellaneous charitable activities in which the Society is engaged.

THE ST. MONICA HOME OF REST

Towards the end of World War I, Henry Herbert Wills decided to devote part of his wealth to the establishment of a trust to build a home for the chronically sick to be known in honour of his wife, Mary Monica Cunliffe Wills, as The St. Monica Home of Rest. Part of the income of the trust was to be used to provide annuities and gifts for people who, for one reason or another, could not be admitted to the Home. For this purpose, he bought the Cote House Estate, Westbury-on-Trym, for £17,000 and made over temporarily to the Official Trustee of Charity Lands and Charity Funds a large number of shares, of which Imperial Tobacco Company shares were by far the most important.[1]

The suggestion that the Society of Merchant Venturers should assume responsibility for the trust seems to have come primarily from Mr. Mervyn King and from Mr. Charles Samuel Clarke, who was a director of the Imperial Tobacco Company.[2] The Wills family up to this time had not had much connection with the Society, but there were obvious advantages in handing over the trust to a permanent corporation which had long experience in managing trust funds, although not on so large a scale, and Mr. Charles Samuel Clarke's personal contact seems to have been of major importance in the decision. From the Society's point of view, there was great interest in the proposal, since it fitted in so well with its long tradition of involvement in charitable activity, and the responsibility offered a challenge, as well as helping to make the Society's work more meaningful at a time when it was already possible to foresee an end to some of its educational work.[3]

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[1] For details of the transactions, see the printed copy of the Deed Poll of 3 April 1922 and the Deed of 10 August 1928, executed by Mrs. Monica Wills, in the Society's archives.

[2] See letter, 30 July 1921, from C. S. Clarke, Senior Warden, to C. Cyril Clarke, Master of the Society.

The negotiations between the Society and Mr. Wills' solicitor, Mr. Napier Abbot, were long and difficult, and a major role was played by the Treasurer, W. W. Ward, both before the signing of the Trust Deed and on a number of occasions afterwards while Dame Monica Wills was still alive and could, had she chosen to do so, have exercised her right to transfer the trust elsewhere.[4]

The Deed Poll was dated 3 April 1922, and as H. H. Wills was then seriously ill, a deputation from the Society waited on him at his home on 29 April and formally accepted the trust.[5] The deed was not entirely satisfactory from the point of view of the trustees, but in view of the illness of H. H. Wills, it was thought best not to ask for further amendments.

The object of the Charity was to build and maintain a Home for "certain Chronic or Incurable Sufferers" who were to be elected by the Council "entirely or as nearly as possible from gentlefolk of good moral character . . . who had led honourable lives . . .". If insufficient numbers of gentlefolk were available, the Council had discretion to admit "persons of somewhat lower social position". Certain categories of sufferers, including those of unsound mind, epileptics and those suffering from infectious or contagious diseases or cancer, were excluded from admission to the Home. Those admitted were to be baptised members of the Church of England, "although, with the consent of the Council, Protestant Nonconformists . . . shall be eligible". They were to be at least 16 years of age on admission, and as far as possible 4 out of 5 at any one time were to be at least 30 years of age. Preference was to be given firstly to those who had been resident in Bristol, Somerset, Gloucestershire or Wiltshire for at least ten years, and in the second place to those

[3] I understand from Miss G. E. Whitaker that the Treasurer, W. W. Ward, was aware of this possibility.

[4] There were, apparently, one or two occasions when she might easily have done so. After the death of her husband, Dame Monica Wills became a very formidable person, and there were difficulties in her relations with some members of the Society.

[5] *H.B.31*, p. 149, 28 April 1922.

from other parts or England, Wales of Scotland, "and also, if the Council think it desirable, from Ireland". The regulations concerning the granting of pensions, annuities and gifts to non-residents were much less strict, and the religious test did not apply to them.

The Home was to be managed by a Council, which consisted in the first place of three life members or Founders (H. H. Wills, Mary Monica Wills and William St. John Fenton Miles); 10 members appointed by the Merchant Venturers; 6 appointed in the first place by the Founders or their nominees, and, after the deaths of the Founders, by other means.[6] Four more were to be coopted by the Council. Thus, initially the Council consisted of 23 members who would be reduced to 20 when the three Founders died. The Founders were empowered in their lifetime to alter these directions, and the Council could, if it wished, appoint new trustees in place of the Society.

The building of The St. Monica Home according to the plans of George Oatley went on from 1922 to 1925, and there gradually arose in Westbury-on-Trym a large building resembling a college or monastery with a bell tower, hall, dormitories and chapel. The building cost over £500,000, and ventilation, heating, electricity, gardens and equipment brought the total cost to over £626,000. H. H. Wills had anticipated that a great deal of the capital would be used up in building, but in fact much of it was paid for by income from the endowments, and considerably more money was available for annuities and gifts than he had anticipated. The year before the Home opened, the Charity Commissioners had authorised the payment of up to £5,000 a year in pensions and gifts.[7]

The Society of Merchant Venturers is responsible for the management of the endowments of The St. Monica Home and hands over the income to the Council, half of which is appointed by the Society, but the history of the Home is really a separate story from that of the history of the Merchant Venturers and cannot be examined in detail here.[8] Nevertheless, something can be said about two matters which have given a great deal of concern to the Society in the last fifty years.

The first of these was the serious threat to the independence of the

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[6] One each by the Bishops of Bristol, Bath and Wells, and Gloucester; one each by the Lord Lieutenants of Somerset and Gloucester, and one by the Lord High Steward of Bristol.

[7] *H.B.31*, p. 234, 28 March 1924.

[8] The Council of St. Monica's appointed W. W. Ward as its first Treasurer. Miss G. E. Whitaker acted as an "unofficial" secretary until the appointment of Mr. F. G. Lazenby as Secretary and House Governor. Her sister, Miss Doris Whitaker, was personal assistant to the Secretary from 1925 to 1957. When the silver jubilee of the Home arrived in 1950, presents were made to 12 people who had been on the staff since its opening (*H.B.34*, p. 384, 23 June 1950). The House Governor is now Major J. R. H. Parlby, M.B.E.

Home, resulting from the passing of the National Health Act in 1946. The question arose as to whether The St. Monica Home was a hospital within the meaning of the Act.[9] The Clerk took counsel's opinion, which was that it did not come within the terms of the Act,[10] but in January 1948 the Minister informed the Society that his legal advisers thought it was a hospital under section 79(i) of the Act and that it should be transferred to him "on the appointed day". He proposed to proceed on that assumption unless the case was referred to arbitration.[11] There were further discussions, and on 29 April the Master reported that the Minister would not change his position, but might perhaps accept a compromise by which he took over the Home but not the endowments. The Master pointed out that the Society could not agree to a compromise, since it believed that The St. Monica Home was not a hospital, and he stated that "it was, therefore, clearly its duty to fight the Minister's contention to the end". The Clerk was quite confident about the legal position, but suggested that a second counsel's opinion should be obtained.[12] As a result of this, the Society considered for a time going to the High Court to obtain a declaration that the Home was not a hospital within the meaning of the Act,[13] but in the end its legal advisers decided that it was best to go to arbitration, since whoever decided the case ought to visit the Home personally and it was unlikely that a High Court Judge would come to Bristol for that purpose.[14]

Three similar institutions were also threatened – the Home and Hospital for Jewish Incurables, the British Home and Hospital for Incurables and the Putney Home for Incurables, and there was consultation with them about tactics.[15] A panel of arbitrators was appointed in January 1949, but the first of the four cases was not heard until March 1950 when the Hall was informed that the Clerk and the Treasurer had been to London to attend the hearing relating to the Home and Hospital for Jewish Incurables. There were lengthy arguments about what constituted a hospital and about whether the treatment and nursing given in the Home made it a hospital within the meaning of the Act. The arbitrators decided that the Jewish Home was not a hospital. This decision was very encouraging, but it was not decisive.[16] The Minister then asked permission for his inspectors to visit St. Monica's and examine the records, and this was agreed.[17] It was not until the end of June 1950 that the Hall was informed that the Minister had decided not to pursue his contention that St. Monica's was a hospital.[18]

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[9] *H.B.34*, p. 99, 28 March 1947.

[10] *H.B.34*, p. 137, 28 Nov. 1947.

[11] *H.B.34*, p. 147, 28 Jan. 1948, referring to the Minister's letter of 21 Jan. 1948.

[12] *H.B.34*, p. 166, 29 April 1948; p. 178, 28 May 1948.

[13] *H.B.34*, pp. 181, 182, 25 June 1948.

[14] *H.B.34*, p. 214, 28 Oct. 1948.

[15] *H.B.34*, pp. 215, 216, 28 Oct. 1948.

[16] For the summary of the arguments put to the arbitrators, see *H.B.34*, pp. 362 ff., 31 March 1950.

[17] *H.B.34*, p. 369, 27 April 1950.

It would undoubtedly have been a great blow to the Society if it had been compelled to hand over the Home to the Ministry, not because it was making any profit from its trusteeship,[19] but because it had become deeply interested in it and because many of its members had over the years given a great deal of their time and knowledge to the management of its affairs, to the great advantage of the Home.[20]

The nominal value of the stock handed over by H. H. Wills in 1922 was approximately £1¼ million, but this was augmented very considerably in subsequent years by additional amounts coming in from his estate and from the estate of Dame Monica Wills after her death in 1931. Moreover, as a result of lengthy negotiations with the Commissioner of Inland Revenue, W. W. Ward succeeded in saving for the charity £48,837 out of the duties they claimed on the endowment.[21]

The management of the very large funds in its care has over the last fifty years presented the Society with many problems, and these are referred to continually in the *Hall Books*. Again, it is not possible to examine here the interesting story of the Society's investment policy, but a few points may be noted.

A great part of the original endowment was in Imperial Tobacco shares, and the sub-committee which managed them was originally known as the Tobacco Shares Sub-Committee. It was not until 1925 that its name was changed to the St. Monica's Investment Sub-Committee.[22] Long before that, the Society had, with the approval of the Charity Commissioners, been engaged in disposing of tobacco shares,[23] since it was aiming primarily at obtaining a stable income rather than capital appreciation. It invested the proceeds in a variety of funds, including central government and local government stocks and in railways. By 1934, the capital value of the endowment was estimated to be worth over £3 million and the annual income was nearly £120,000.

Towards the end of World War II, the Master, Sir Foster Gotch

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[18] *H.B.34*, p. 386, 23 June 1950.

[19] The Society makes a management charge to cover some of the cost of office work involved, but this is relatively very small in relation to the size of the endowment and does not, of course, include any payment for the immense amount of voluntary work done by its members.

[20] In view of the present conditions for many geriatric cases, the residents and annuitants of St. Monica's over the years gave good reason to be grateful to the Founders and those who have carried out their intentions.

[21] *H.B.31*, pp. 252 ff., 24 Oct. 1924. The issue raised was the amount of duty consequent on a gift *inter vivos*.

[22] *H.B.31*, p. 319, 27 Nov. 1925.

[23] *H.B.31*, pp. 183, 184, 22 Dec. 1922, and numerous subsequent entries.

Robinson, took the lead in urging that some of the money of the charity should be invested in agricultural land "as a measure of prudence to guard against possible inflation",[24] and in that year the Society purchased on behalf of the Home the Mentmore estate in Buckinghamshire from Lord Rosebery. This consisted of just under 4,500 acres and cost £127,000.[25] The Society joined the Central Landowners' Association, and in the years that followed it purchased a large number of agricultural estates, mainly in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland.[26] By 1951, the book value of the estates was £1½ million,[27] and in 1973 over 80 per cent of the capital was invested in agricultural land.[28] The policy of large-scale investment in land has, on occasions, met with some criticism during the last thirty years, and at times the income from the charity was less than could have been obtained from other kinds of investment.[29] In recent years, some of the estates have been sold and part of the proceeds has been invested in commercial and industrial property.[30]

The Home now has places for 120 residents, and the number of annuitants is just under 300. In recent years, the Society has been concerned with the question of future policy with regard to the trust.[31] The effect of the development of the National Health Service meant that, whereas before World War II many of the residents in the Home were comparatively young, now most of them were old, and the Home was tending to become not so much a place for the care of the chronically sick as an Old Ladies' Home. In common with other places for care of the aged, the Home found difficulty in recruiting suitable nursing staff. There was a good deal of discussion with other groups concerned with the care of terminal cases, and the possibility of establishing a home for terminal and geriatric cases was considered. It was estimated that the initial cost of such a home would be about £500,000, and there was the problem of rising prices. It was not possible to make provision of that kind from the surplus income of the trust. What was done, however, in the following years was to convert part of the building into accommodation for married couples, and other plans are under consideration to try to ensure that The St. Monica Home of Rest houses a mixed community and is not just another Old People's Home.

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[24] *H.B.33*, p. 343, 25 Feb. 1944.

[25] *H.B.33*, p. 343, 25 Feb. 1944; p. 348, 31 March 1944; p. 349, 27 April 1944; p. 353, 26 May 1944; p. 355, 30 June 1944.

[26] It is not possible here to give all the details of the purchase and sale of land between 1944 and the present day. The main group of estates in the Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland included the Wicken Estate; Milton Keynes Estate; Lilford Estate; Wootton and Dorton Estate; the Ravenstone Estate; Wade Estate; the Ringstead and Addington Estate. Other purchases included Lullington Estate in Derbyshire and Kirklinton Estate in Cumberland.

[27] *H.35*, p. 59, 23 Feb. 1951.

[28] *H.B.41*, p. 77, 7 May 1973.

[29] See, for example, *H.B.35*, p. 70, 26 April 1951; *H.B.39*, pp. 171 ff., 2 Dec. 1966; *H.B.41*, p. 77, 7 May 1973.

[30] *H.B.41*, p. 42, 26 Oct. 1972; p. 77, 7 May 1973.

[31] In 1969, a Special Committee was set up to consider the future objects of the Society, and this naturally gave a good deal of attention to St. Monica's (see *H.B.40*, p. 110, 31 March 1969; pp. 131–3, 23 June 1969; p. 143, 12 Sept. 1969; p. 149, 20 Oct. 1969; p. 158, 21 Nov. 1969; p. 169, 29 Jan. 1970; p. 180, 16 March 1970; p. 227, 18 Dec. 1970; p. 268, 28 Sept. 1971; p. 273, 15 Oct. 1971; *H.B.41*, p. 20, 8 May 1972; p. 61, 23 Feb. 1973; p. 77, 7 May 1973; p. 85, 13 July 1973; pp. 116 ff., 21 Dec. 1973).

OTHER CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Since 1900 the Society has added considerably to the list of trusts and legacies, large and small, for which it is responsible. A number of these were for scholarships and prizes for pupils in Colston's School, Colston's Girls' School and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College. They included the Proctor Baker legacy for scholarships at the Merchant Venturers' Technical College and the Colston Schools;[32] the Claude B. Fry Trust of £2,000 for exhibitions for Colston boys to be held at Bristol University;[33] the E. W. Allen Trust of £4,000 for University scholarships or other purposes;[34] the H. Messenger Trust to help fee-payers at Colston's who could no longer afford the fees and also for the benefit of scholars who held place No. 152;[35] the W. C. R. Parrish Fund for University scholarships for Colston boys;[36] £1,000 left in trust for Colston School by Stanley H. Ford;[37] £10,000 given by Sir Charles Colston for the benefit of the school;[38] and £1,000 left for entrance scholarships by Miss Becket, sister of the late Second Master.[39] Trusts and donations relating to Colston's Girls' School included the Edith M. Openshaw Memorial Fund and the Helen Drew Loan Fund given by past and present pupils to commemorate former teachers at the school;[40] £500 left by Mrs. Gatcliff, a former headmistress;[41] the Canon T. Gamble Trust to provide scholarships for Colston girls at Women's Colleges, and the G. M. Morgan Memorial Fund.[42] There were also a large number of gifts and legacies to provide prizes, such as the Brooks Memorial Fund for a divinity prize at Colston's Boys' School;[43] a legacy left by the widow of the Rev. H. J. Wilkins for a prize for the best sportsman of the year, to be chosen by the boys in the upper forms;[44] the Stanley Samborne Curtis Memorial Fund for the best part-time student in the Merchant Venturers' Technical College;[45] and a donation from the Colston Old Girls to give a prize in memory of Miss Beatrice M. Sparks.[46]

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[32] *H.B.29*, p. 288, 20 Dec. 1907.

[33] *H.B.33*, p. 56, 24 Sept. 1937; *H.B.35*, p. 216, 24 July 1952.

[34] *H.B.33*, p. 100, 30 Sept. 1938; p. 259, 28 Jan. 1942.

[35] *H.B.33*, p. 169, 24 Nov. 1939; *H.B.34*, p. 35, 29 March 1946; p. 70, 24 Oct. 1946.

[36] *H.B.33*, pp. 259, 260, 28 Jan. 1942.

[37] *H.B.35*, pp. 43 ff., 20 Jan. 1951.

[38] *H.B.37*, p. 163, 29 May 1959.

[39] *H.B.38*, p. 20, 26 Jan. 1951.

[40] *H.B.32*, p. 14, 26 Oct. 1928.

[41] *H.B.30*, p. 332, 26 Oct. 1917.

[42] *H.B.32*, p. 88, 24 Jan. 1930; *H.B.37*, p. 82, 15 May 1938 (Finance Sub-Committee).

[43] *H.B.32*, p. 9, 28 Sept. 1928.

Among the miscellaneous responsibilities undertaken by the Society was one originally known as the Stanstead College Trust. In 1956, the Charity Commissioners asked the Merchant Venturers to take this over under a new scheme. It was for the benefit of poor men of good character of at least fifty years of age who had been merchants and who had lost their money by accident or misfortune in trading. In default of such applicants, the income was to be applied for the benefit of men of similar type in wholesale or retail business who had had a substantial personal stake in the business or who had been in the mercantile marine. The trust was at the time worth about £27,000, and from its income pensions of £250 were to be paid. The Charity Commissioners later changed the name to the Charles Dixon Pension Fund, and the Society has from time to time made a number of grants under the scheme.[47]

Other trusts included the management of the Stoke Bishop War Memorial Fund;[48] a gift of land made in 1934 by Henry Wills Gunn for recreational purposes, primarily for the benefit of Westbury-on-Trym Cricket Club;[49] and a gift of 8½ acres of land in Lawrence Weston made by W. H. Blandy for the benefit of the Grateful Society and the Vicar of Henbury.[50] In 1954, the Society agreed to act as custodian trustee for the investments of the Bristol Sailors' Home,[51] and it acts in a similar capacity for various groups of the Bristol Boy Scouts' Association,[52] the Cote Charity[53] and the Jackson-Roeckel Teachers' Provident Association.[54]

In 1969, by agreement with the Charity Commissioners, it arranged for the funds of charities too small to be invested separately to be put in a Merchant Venturers' Charity Investment Pool.[55]

In 1972, the Society decided to set up a new General Charitable Trust which would enable it to back projects which were for the benefit of the city.[56]

[44] *H.B.33*, p. 283, 25 Sept. 1942.

[45] *H.B.34*, p. 20, 21 Dec. 1945.

[46] *H.B.36*, p. 144, 16 Dec. 1955.

[47] *H.B.36*, p. 154, 26 Jan. 1956; pp. 188 ff., 29 June 1956; *H.B.37*, p. 76, 24 April 1958; p. 97, 24 July 1958; *H.B.38*, p. 187, 15 March 1963; p. 252, 13 Dec. 1963; *H.B.39*, p. 112, 26 Nov. 1965.

[48] *H.B.31*, p. 285, 24 April 1925.

[49] *H.B.32*, p. 328, 26 July 1934.

[50] *H.B.33*, p. 27, 27 Nov. 1936.

[51] *H.B.35*, p. 394, 26 Feb. 1954.

[52] *H.B.37*, p. 180, 23 July 1959; *H.B.38*, p. 103, 11 Jan. 1962.

[53] *H.B.40*, p. 33, 29 March 1968.

[54] *H.B.40*, p. 182, 26 Sept. 1969.

[55] *H.B.40*, p. 61, 5 Dec. 1969.

[56] *H.B.41*, p. 19, 28 April 1972. See p. 546.

THE ALMSHOUSES

In the twentieth century, the Society has continued to be responsible for its own Merchants' Almshouse and for Colston's Almshouse and to exercise supervision over Hill's Almshouse. In addition, it has in recent years taken over the running of a fourth almshouse. Management and supervision have been exercised through small visiting committees which report to the Standing Committee, and final decisions about admissions are made at General Meetings of the Hall.

There were no major changes relating to the almshouses before World War II and only a few details can be noted here. In 1909, at the request of the Rector and Churchwardens of St. Stephen's, the Society took over the management of an endowment made in the will of Lavers Alleyn in the early nineteenth century for providing women in the Merchants' Almshouse with drapery and grocery at Christmas and Easter.[57] In 1914, the visiting committee found that the drains at Hill's Almshouse, which was not directly managed by the Society, were in a deplorable condition, and took action to get them reconstructed.[58] In the same year, some garden seats were provided for the almsfolk in the Merchants' Almshouse, and the committee recommended that in future the walls of the rooms should be painted in a lighter colour.[59] Towards the end of World War I, steps were taken to supplement the pay of the almsfolk.[60] In 1923, the Treasurer was authorised to prepare a room in which inmates might be read to by visitors, and the Society undertook to pay £25 a year to a chaplain and 10s. a week to a nurse to attend to the needs of the almsfolk.[61]

When World War II broke out, the Society took the necessary air-raid precautions for the almsfolk, but the Merchants' Almshouse suffered severe damage in the raids of 1940 and 1941, although there were no casualties.[62] The almshouse became uninhabitable, and the Society moved some of the almsfolk to Colston's Almshouse and paid a billeting allowance to others who went to live with friends. It contributed to the cost of evacuation and maintenance for those who went to the country.[63]

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[57] *H.B.29*, p. 347, 26 March 1909. The endowment was then held in the form of £475 stock in the West Cornwall Railway and £500 in 3½ per cent Bristol Corporation debentures.

[58] *H.B.30*, p. 168, 29 April 1914. The Society had visitorial powers (see p. 403).

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 168.

[60] *H.B.30*, p. 306, 27 April 1917. See also *H.B.31*, p. 9, 25 July 1919, for Hill's Almshouse.

[61] *H.B.31*, pp. 136, 137, 23 Dec. 1923; p. 142, 24 Feb. 1922; p. 191, 23 Feb. 1923. In 1929, however, the Visiting Committee reported that in view of the satisfactory financial state of the trust, it was not necessary for the Society to continue making a donation for these purposes.

[62] See pp. 459–61.

In 1942, the Corporation informed the Society that it wished to acquire part of the site of the Hall and the Almshouse for road-widening and for making a roundabout, and eventually the Almshouse Trust received £1,140 for 76 square yards bought by the Corporation.[64]

After the war, the question arose as to whether the damaged Merchants' Almshouse should be repaired and reconstructed on the existing site. The question was closely related to that of whether the Hall should be rebuilt in its old position. If it was decided not to rebuild the Hall but to sell the site for re-development, it seemed likely that its value would be increased if the almshouse site could also be included in the sale. Both the Almshouse Trust and the Society would then benefit from the increased value of the combined sites.[65] The case for such an arrangement seemed all the stronger because the Society was advised that it would not be possible to reconstruct the Almshouse at a reasonable cost.

It was some time before the Society reached agreement with the War Damage Commissioners on a "value" payment for the Hall site and decided to proceed with selling it for re-development,[66] and it was not until 1955 that the question of whether the Almshouse site should be included in the sale came to a head. At a meeting of the Standing Committee on 27 October, the Surveyor pointed out that if both sites could be sold together, the value of both would be increased. The Clerk pointed out that the Almshouse was a scheduled building and that the consent of the Corporation would be required before it could be pulled down. The question was raised as to whether the building could again be used as an almshouse and and whether there was in any case a need for this particular kind of almshouse. The general opinion was that both sites should be sold together, but the matter was referred to a sub-committee.[67]

In December 1955, the Standing Committee was informed that the Treasurer had taken the matter up with the Charity Commissioners, pointing out that part of the building had been destroyed in 1941, that there was little demand for this kind of almshouse,[68] and that the war damage payments would merely make good the damage and not cover the cost of a new building. He suggested that there might be a case for a new scheme combining the Merchants' Almshouse and Colston's. The Charity Commissioners had been sympathetic, and the Standing Committee thought that the

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[63] *H.B.33*, p. 238, 30 May 1941; p. 239, 27 June 1941.

[64] See p. 461.

[65] *H.B.35*, p. 56, 23 Feb. 1951.

[66] See pp. 462 ff.

[67] *H.B.36*, p. 123, 27 Oct. 1955.

[68] I.e., one which catered primarily for former mariners and their dependants.

Merchant Venturers' Almshouse Charity could not undertake to preserve the almshouse simply as a building of historic interest. If it was to be preserved, it must in the interest of the Charity be sold to some one willing to preserve it, and the price must be one which, added to the price to be obtained from the rest of the site, would be equal to the price which the trustees might have obtained if the Almshouse had been demolished and the whole site sold in conjunction with the Hall site. The matter was referred to a sub-committee, and the surveyor was instructed to approach the Corporation about the possibility of removing the Almshouse from the list of scheduled buildings.[69]

At this point, then, there was serious danger that the Merchants' Almshouse would not be preserved. It must be noted that the Standing Commitee believed that it was not possible to reconstruct the the building at an economic price and that it felt that under its trust it had an obligation to obtain the best possible price for the site with a view to using the money in a new scheme to be approved by the Charity Commissioners. It could also be argued that a site in the centre of Bristol and on the edge of a traffic roundabout was not the ideal spot for a home for old people and that from their point of view a modern building had advantages over a reconstructed eighteenth-century almhouse. On the other hand, it might be suggested that some, but not all, of those concerned were rather too ready to accept the view that the question should be decided not on sentiment but on what was most financially advantageous.[70]

The Merchant Venturers' Almshouse was saved primarily by the action of the Corporation to which the question of de-scheduling a listed building had to be referred. In November 1956, the Hall was informed that the City's Housing Committee wished to buy the building and reconstruct the interior to form 5 small dwellings at an estimated cost of about £5,000. It asked if the Society would agree to sell the Almshouse for this purpose at a price substantially below the market value. The Clerk pointed out that, as trustees, the Society could not do this, and he doubted if the Charity Commissioners would give approval. He also stated that he had been assuming that the building was not fit for restoration and that the intention was to put up a new building elsewhere. Now, it seemed that the Almshouse might be capable of reconstruction, and he thought the Society should reconsider the possibility of doing the work itself.[71] Some members of the Society, including the Hon. W. R. S. Bathurst and Mr. J. E. C. Clarke, were determined that if the Almshouse could be saved, the task should be undertaken by the Merchant Venturers. The Surveyor and Treasurer were asked to confer with the City

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[69] *H.B.36*, p. 149, 16 Dec. 1955.

[70] *H.B.36*, pp. 126 ff., 28 Oct. 1955.

[71] *H.B.36*, pp. 236, 237, 30 Nov. 1956.

Architect and to consider his tentative plans. It seemed that it would be possible after all to reconstruct the interior to provide 4 or 5 dwellings. The Surveyor estimated the cost as between £6,000 and £7,000, and the City Architect put it at something over £5,000. The Standing Committee thought that, having regard to the value of the site, £7,000 would not be strictly economic but that nevertheless the question should be examined further.[72] The Corporation expressed its pleasure that the Almshouse might be preserved and offered every help.[73] The Charity Commissioners said that if funds were available for modernisation and if the Society thought that residents could be found, they would approve reconstruction and also agree to the sale of a small part of the site which the Northern Assurance Company required for access to the building it was putting on the old Hall site.[74]

In June 1957, the Surveyor was asked to prepare plans, and a tender for £9,881 5s, 9d. was obtained in February 1958.[75] A grant of £3,979 was obtained for the work under an Act of 1957.[76] The total cost of the work was £10,661 6s. 8d., and the net cost, after deducting grants and donations, was £6,508.[77] The restored Almshouse was opened on 29 October 1959.[78] The self-contained units were to be occupied if possible by retired mariners or their dependants, and priority was to be given to married couples.[79] In 1961, it was agreed to subsidise the gas and electricity.[80] Excess income from the trust is used to help Colston's Almshouse.

The charming building in the centre of Bristol at present houses about a dozen almsfolk. It is not an altogether ideal site for an almshouse,[81] but now that the Hall has been moved elsewhere, it enables the Society to maintain a presence in the centre of Bristol. It would have been sad if this link with Gild of Mariners of the mid-fifteenth century had been allowed to perish.

Colston's Almshouse continues to be administered by the Society and has at present accommodation for 4 married couples and 12 single persons, with a cottage at the back for the warden. Hill's

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[72] *H.B.36*, pp. 244 ff., 14 Dec. 1956.

[73] *H.B.36*, p. 250, 24 Jan. 1957.

[74] *H.B.36*, p. 283, 22 March 1957.

[75] *H.B.37*, pp. 13, 15, 28 June 1957; p. 62, 28 Feb. 1958.

[76] *H.B.37*, p. 118, 28 Nov. 1958.

[77] *H.B.37*, p. 212, 30 Nov. 1959.

[78] *H.B.37*, p. 185, 18 Sept. 1959 (Finance Sub-Committee).

[79] *H.B.37*, p. 214, 30 Nov. 1959.

[80] *H.B.38*, p. 100, 29 Dec. 1961. See also *H.B.40*, p. 238, 26 Feb. 1971; *H.B.41*, p. 43, 26 Oct. 1972; p. 49, 24 Nov. 1972; p. 81, 25 May 1973.

[81] In 1961, for example, the almsfolk complained that the public were entering the forecourt and using the seats in front of the almshouse (*H.B.38*, p. 93, 24 Nov. 1961) and, more recently, it has been found necessary to put up iron railings to keep out vandals (see footnote 79).

Almshouse has a separate management, but the Society acts as Visitor under the trust and nominates to some of the places.[82]

The new responsibility which the Society has undertaken in recent years is the management of the combined almshouse of St. Nicholas and Burton. St. Nicholas Almshouse in King Street was built by the parish on land given by the Corporation in the mid-seventeenth century.[83] Burton's Almshouse in the parish of St. Thomas was alleged to have been founded by Symon Burton in 1292, but it is more likely that it takes its origin from John Burton in the fifteenth century.[84]

In World War II, Burton's Almshouse was completely destroyed and St. Nicholas Almshouse was badly damaged. After the war, the vicar of St. Nicholas worked hard to restore the Almshouse, and the present Treasurer of the Society was heavily involved as Clerk to the Trustees. The almshouse was re-opened, but there were insufficient funds to provide all that was needed. The trustees of Burton's Almshouse were willing to make their funds available now that their own almshouse had been destroyed, and Mr. J. E. C. Clarke proposed that the Society should be asked to take over the management of the combined almshouses.[85] In a report in July 1963 he pointed out that conditions in the almshouse were not as good as in the Merchants' Almshouse or Colston's, and that in addition the almsfolk were asked to pay 10s. a week. The trustees of the two almshouses were willing to ask the Charity Commissioners to sanction a new scheme. Pending this, the Society asked a sub-committee to make immediate arrangements for improvement "to ensure that the Residents . . . do not suffer hardship through cold and draught through the coming winter". Approximately £1,000 was spent on double glazing, night-storage heaters and gasfires, and the Society gave Christmas gifts to the almsfolk in the same way as it did to those in the Merchants' Almhouse and Colston's.[86] Extensive repairs and improvements were carried out in subsequent years.[87]

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[82] See p. 403.

[83] See T. Manchee, *Bristol Charities*, Bristol, 1831, II. pp. 199 ff.

[84] *Ibid.*, II. pp. 333 ff.

[85] *H.B.38*, p. 210, 14 June 1963.

[86] *H.B.38*, p. 222, 25 July 1963; p. 230, 20 Sept. 1963; p. 244, 15 Nov. 1963. In the course of the work on the almshouse, part of the city bastion was discovered and a number of interesting glass and pottery finds were made in what had been the old moat. The Treasurer arranged for the original plans to be altered and the moat was not filled in, but girders were put across it.

[87] *H.B.38*, p. 263, 30 Jan. 1964; *H.B.39*, p. 141, 27 May 1966; *H.B.40*, p. 247 29 April 1971.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS

Part of the Society's contributions to charitable activity has taken the form of annual subscriptions and part consists of donations to particular appeals. Annual subscription voted in 1970 amounted to £703 9s., and other gifts and donations brought the total to £1,137 4s.[88]

The amount given in the form of annual subscription has varied over the years, but before World War II it averaged about £500 a year. It was spread among a large number of different organisations. In 1903, for example, there were 49 annual subscriptions amounting in all to £432 5s. Only 7 subscriptions were over 10 guineas: £50 to the Chamber of Commerce; 26 guineas to the Bristol Benevolent Society; £25 to the *Formidable* training ship; £21 each to the Bristol Royal Infirmary and the Bristol General Hospital; £20 to the Bristol Royal Infirmary chaplaincy; 10 guineas to the Bristol General Hospital chaplaincy; and 15 guineas to the Bristol Dispensary. About £70 was given to 12 educational and training institutions such as the Clifton Industrial School, the Bristol Female Penitentiary, Fishponds Training College, the Bristol Certified Girls Industrial School, Stogursey parochial school and a creche at Hotwells. About £50 went to hospitals and institutions for the care of the sick and the disabled, such as the Bristol Hospital for Sick Children, the Home for Crippled Children, the West of England Sanatorium, the Bristol Eye Hospital, Bridgwater Infirmary and Bristol Blind Asylum. Subscriptions to various volunteer organisations amounted to £26, and about the same amount was given to certain religious societies such as the Scripture Readers' Association and the Bristol Diocesan Mission. Organisations connected with the sea, such as the Bristol Seamen's Institute, the Bristol Sailors' Home and the Shipwrecked Mariners' Association, received £21.[89] The pattern of subscriptions has naturally changed over the years, but the 1903 list gives a general indication of the kinds of organisation to which the Society gave continuing support. In 1974, it paid 66 annual subscriptions amounting in all to £850.

It would be tedious to list the many hundreds of donations given in response to particular appeals, but a few of them may be noted. In general, the aim seems to have been to contribute generously to national appeals and to help meet a large variety of local needs, sometimes with the proviso that the donation was conditional on the whole sum being raised. Response to national appeals included £25 to the Durham Fire Relief Fund in 1906;[90] 100 guineas in 1907 to

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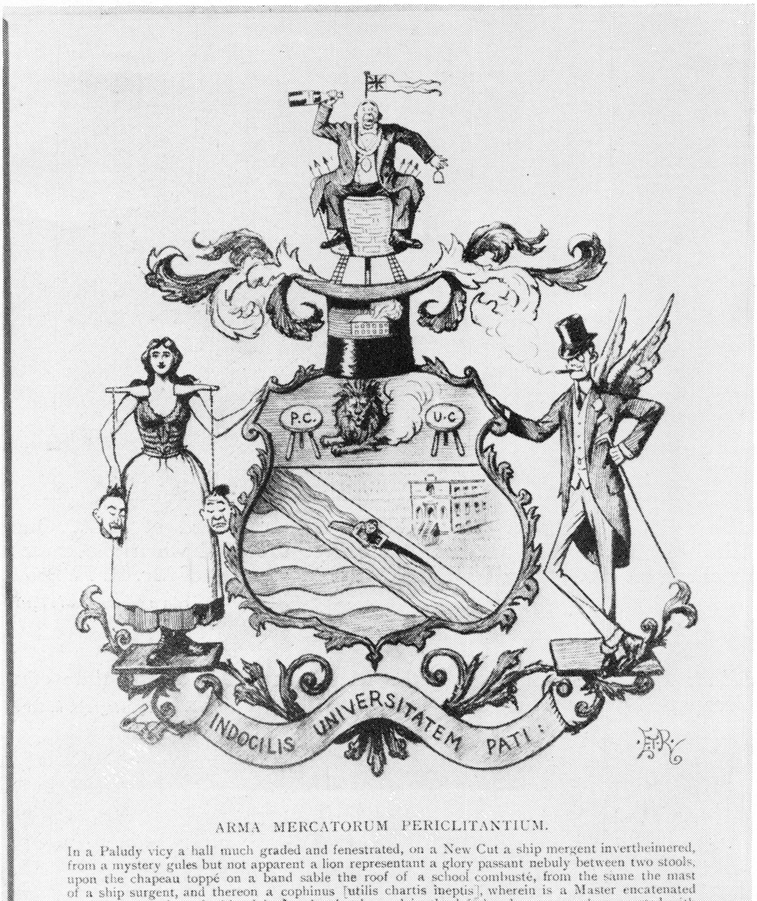
[88] *H.B.40*, p. 226, 4 Dec. 1970.

[89] *H.B.29*, pp. 41 ff., 24 April 1903.

[90] *H.B.29*, p. 184, 30 March 1906.

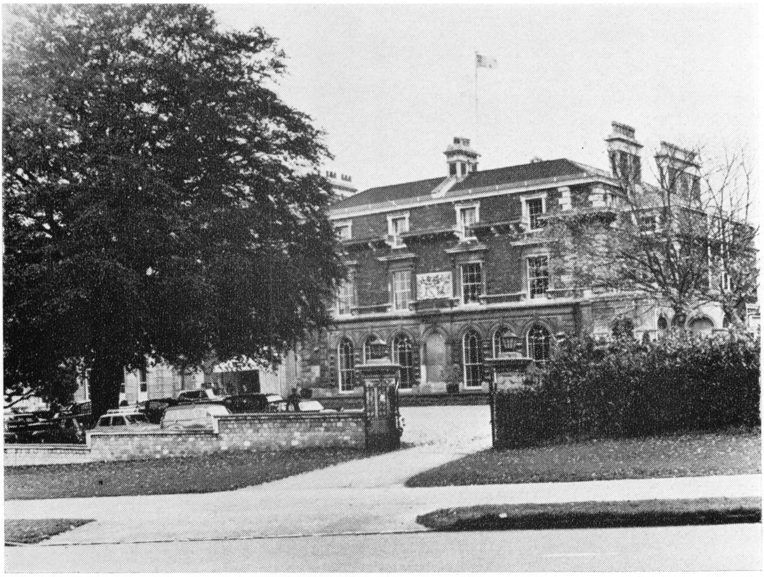


ARMA MERCATORUM PERICLITANTIUM.

In a Paludy vicy a hall much graded and fenestrated, on a New Cut a ship mergent invertheimered, from a mystery gules but not apparent a lion representant a glory passant nebuly between two stools, upon the chapeau toppé on a band sable the roof of a school combusté, from the same the mast of a ship surgent, and thereon a cophinus [utilis chartis ineptis], wherein is a Master encatenated or, in proper colour, in his right hand a bottle, and in the left hand a cup versé, supported with two supporters, the first a (Bristol milk)-maid, the upper part decolleté, her hair and hands gules, in her right hand a Pope's head affronté, in her left a Ward (the quay lost), the second supporter is an apprentice de sept ans periclitant autonomous, financially independent or, in proper colour (azure, no other admitted), in his left hand a stick, the shaft sable, the handle argent, about to take a taxi, reckless. Motto: "*Indocilis Universitatem pati.*"

Cartoon lampooning the Society's attitude to the proposed University of Bristol. Preserved in the Hall.

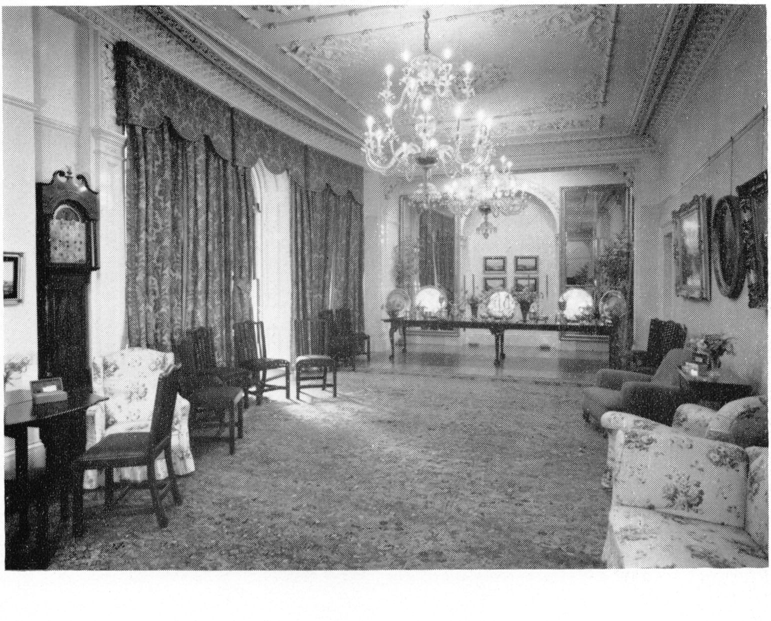
Photograph by G. Kelsey



Above: The Merchants' Hall, Clifton. The standard of H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, flying over the Hall when she came to luncheon on 28 October 1966 during the Mastership of Mr. R. H. Brown.

From a photograph in the Hall

Below: Part of the interior of the Merchants' Hall at the time of the Coronation Ball, 11 June 1953. *From a photograph in the Hall*



the Lord Mayor's Fund for the relief of the victims of an earthquake in Jamaica;[91] 100 guineas given in 1908 to the Lord Mayor's Fund to provide work for the unemployed;[92] and numerous donations during World War I for encouraging recruitment, supplying comforts to the troops and assisting the work of the Red Cross.[93]

Donations to national appeals between the wars included 100 guineas to the Lord Mayor's Relief Fund in 1920;[94] 100 guineas to a fund for the relief of Bethune in France in 1922;[95] 25 guineas for Hurricane Relief in Antigua in 1925;[96] a contribution of £525 to the National Exchequer in the crisis of 1931;[97] 100 guineas to the great Gresford Colliery disaster in 1934;[98] and 250 guineas to the Prince of Wales Jubilee Thanksgiving Fund in 1935.[99]

World War II, like its predecessor, resulted in a large number of donations to help deal with the war effort and the relief of war victims, but these can be more conveniently noted elsewhere.[100]

Among the post-war donations to national appeals were 100 guineas to the Lord Mayor's Flood Distress Appeal in 1947;[101] 250 guineas to the George VI National Appeal in 1952;[102] 50 guineas to the Hungarian Relief Fund and a covenant to pay the Bristol University Students' Union £25 a year for four years to help exiled Hungarian students;[103] £100 to the Lord Mayor's Freedom from Hunger Appeal in 1964 to help provide a Farm Institute and Training Centre in Nyasaland,[104] and 100 guineas to the Winston Churchill Memorial Appeal in 1965.[105]

Donations large and small have been made throughout the period to hospitals and organisations concerned with the care of the sick. Again, it is not possible to give all the details, but by way of illustration we can note £1,000 for the rebuilding and extension of the Bristol Royal Infirmary in 1905;[106] £500 towards the building of an Isolation Ward for the Bristol General Hospital in 1907,[107] and 100 guineas to the Special Appeal of the Children's Hospital in the same year;[108] 25 guineas for a proposed Farm Colony for the care of the feeble-minded in 1914;[109] 100 guineas to the Bristol Royal Infirmary

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[91] *H.B.29*, p. 232, 25 Jan. 1907.

[92] *H.B.29*, p. 332, 27 Nov. 1908.

[93] See, for example, *H.B.30*, p. 191, 30 Oct. 1914; p. 200, 27 Nov. 1914; p. 204, 18 Dec. 1914; p. 225, 23 July 1915; p. 243, 17 Dec. 1915; p. 263, 28 April 1916; p. 269, 30 June 1916; p. 333, 26 Oct. 1917; p. 344, 30 Nov. 1917; p. 363, 22 Feb. 1918. See also pp. 538–9.

[94] *H.B.31*, p. 87, 31 Dec. 1920.

[95] *H.B.31*, p. 168, 29 Sept. 1922.

[96] *H.B.31*, p. 270, 30 Jan. 1925.

[97] *H.B.32*, p. 168, 25 Sept. 1931.

[98] *H.B.32*, p. 333, 28 Sept. 1934.

[99] *H.B.32*, p. 362, 22 March 1935.

[100] See pp. 540–1.

[101] *H.B.34*, p. 98, 28 March 1947.

[102] *H.B.35*, p. 228, 26 Sept. 1952.

[103] *H.B.36*, p. 230, 30 Nov. 1956; p. 246, 24 June 1957.

[104] *H.B.38*, p. 268, 14 Feb. 1964.

[105] *H.B.39*, p. 46, 26 March 1965.

[106] *H.B.29*, p. 172, 22 Dec. 1905.

[107] *H.B.29*, p. 252, 22 March 1907.

[108] *H.B.29*, p. 289, 20 Dec. 1907.

[109] *H.B.30*, p. 166, 24 April 1914.

Appeal in 1921;[110] £50 to the Bristol District Nurses Association in 1925;[111] and £500 to the Lord Mayor's Hospital Extension Fund in 1932.[112]

Among the many other organisations which have received assistance are the Boy Scouts, the National Association for the Employment of Reserve Soldiers, the Clifton Improvement Society, Scott's British Antarctic Expedition, the Bristol Training School for Police Women, the Children's Help Society, the Bristol Play Centre, the Bristol and West of England Newspaper Press Fund, the Bristol City Marine Ambulance Corps, St. John's Ambulance Corps, the Bristol Crippled Children's Society, the Bristol Day and Night Nursery, the Bristol Civic League, the Royal Geographical Society, the League of Nations Union, the Ashley Hostel for Boys, the Bristol Federation of Boys' Clubs, the Bristol Sea Cadet Corps, the Bristol Sailors' Home and the Bristol and District Methodists Association to help fit out Kelston Park as a training centre for young people.

Donations in recent years have included £250 to the Y.M.C.A. Appeal and £150 to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme in connection with its Industrial Award Project;[113] £100 to Toc H for its Hospital Broadcasting scheme;[114] £100 a year for 10 years and a donation of £250 for the Bristol Old Vic Appeal;[115] £300 for the restoration of John Wesley's Chapel;[116] and £750 to the Bristol Social Centre.[117]

As in earlier times, the Society has continued to assist members and relatives of members who meet with misfortune and has extended this help to those who have been in the service of the Hall or in institutions such as Colston's School with which the Society is closely associated. Its contributions to the Church of England, to education and to the public life of Bristol are examined elsewhere.[118]

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[110] *H.B.31*, p. 99, 18 March 1921.

[111] *H.B.31*, p. 284, 24 April 1925.

[112] *H.B.32*, p. 220, 17 June 1932.

[113] *H.B.40*, p. 273, 15 Oct. 1971.

[114] *H.B.41*, p. 1, 14 Jan. 1972.

[115] *H.B.41*, p. 3, 27 Jan. 1972.

[116] *H.B.41*, p. 106, 25 Oct. 1973.

[117] *H.B.41*, p. 79, 11 May 1973.

[118] See pp. 529–33, 535–7 and chapter 25.

CHAPTER 27

Miscellaneous Activities in the Twentieth Century

ENTERTAINMENT, HOSPITALITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

IN the twentieth century, the Society has continued its long tradition of involvement in royal occasions. In 1901, for example, it was officially invited by the Lord Mayor to attend the proclamation of Edward VII on 26 January. Members were expected to attend in full mourning for the death of Queen Victoria. The boys from Colston's School went in front of the Society in the procession to the Exchange and then returned to the steps of the Hall. Each boy was given a black rosette, a cake and a shilling, but it was decided that "the Boys band of music should not accompany the Society on the procession to the Exchange".[1] The next year, the Society gave a Coronation Ball and contributed 100 guineas to the Coronation festivities in Bristol.[2] On 4 June representatives attended the Cathedral for a Peace Thanksgiving Service after the end of the South African War, and on 26 June they were present at a Service of Intercession in connection with the serious illness of Edward VII.[3]

King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra came to Bristol in 1908 to open the new dock at Avonmouth, and the Society took appropriate action. The Hall and Observatory were decorated and illuminated, and 100 guineas was donated to the Lord Mayor's Fund to prepare a welcome for the visitors. A Loyal Address was presented in which the Society took the opportunity of referring to its interest in the proposed University of Bristol.[4]

When King George V succeeded to the throne in 1910, the Society again took part in the procession to proclaim the new King,[5] and it also contributed 100 guineas to the Lord Mayor's Memorial Fund for King Edward VII.[6]

There was another royal visit in 1912 when George V and Queen Mary came to open the Edward VII Royal Memorial Infirmary. The Master was presented to the King at Temple Meads Station, and the Society's Loyal Address made reference to "one who has heard the call of the sea" and "whom his Island Subjects love to greet as their Sailor King".[7]

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[1] *H.B.28*, p. 385, 25 Jan. 1901.

[2] *H.B.28*, p. 443, 28 Feb. 1902; 20 March 1902.

[3] *H.B.29*, 20 June 1902.

[4] *H.B.29*, pp. 305, 306; 29 May 1908; p. 308, 26 June 1908; p. 310, 24 July 1908. For the reference to the proposed University, see p. 502.

[5] *H.B.29*, p. 406, 13 May 1910.

[6] *H.B.29*, p. 449, 28 April 1911.

In 1921, when the Prince of Wales visited Bristol, he was entertained in the Hall and the freedom was conferred upon him.[8] Five years later, when his parents came to Bristol, the Society again presented a Loyal Address. In 1928 at the request of the Bristol Crippled Children's Society, the Society gave a luncheon for the Duke and Duchess of York when they came to lay the foundation stone of a Hospital School at Winford.[9] Two years later, Prince George was entertained to lunch.[10]

During World War II, the Princess Royal took the salute at a March Past of Women in the services during Bristol's Salute the Soldier Week. As the Hall had been destroyed, the Master entertained her at The St. Monica Home.[11] In 1954, Prince Philip was entertained in the new Hall and the freedom was conferred upon him.[12] Nineteen years later, his son, Prince Charles, followed in his father's footsteps by accepting honorary membership of the Society.[13] When the Queen Mother lunched at the Hall on 28 October 1966 and saw the copies of Winterhalter's huge portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, she remarked on having so often seen the originals at Windsor.[14]

A number of other distinguished visitors to Bristol have been offered hospitality in the Hall. In 1907, for example, the Master entertained to luncheon Sir Wilfred Laurier, Prime Minister of Canada; Sir Robert Bond, Prime Minister of Newfoundland; Sir I. G. Ward, Prime Minister of New Zealand; and Mr. E. R. Moor, Prime Minister of Natal.[15] In 1922, Lord Grey was asked to luncheon when he visited Bristol "in support of the League of Nations".[16] The judges usually dined in the Hall when they came for the Assizes, and in 1947 the Lord Chief Justice was the guest of the Society.[17]

Hospitality and help has also been given to numerous organisations and groups visiting Bristol. In 1914, for example, the Master reported that he had entertained members of the Historical Association, which was holding its annual conference in the city, and had given a short epitome of the Society's history.[18] When the British Association met in Bristol in 1930, the Master agreed to be one of the

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[7] *H.B.30*, p. 48, 31 May 1912; pp. 57, 62 ff., 26 July 1912.

[8] *H.B.31*, p. 102, 29 April 1921; pp. 109–12, 20 May 1921.

[9] *H.B.31*, p. 292, 22 May 1925; p. 422, 27 Jan. 1928.

[10] *H.B.32*, p. 98, 1 May 1930.

[11] *H.B.33*, p. 354, 26 May 1944.

[12] *H.B.36*, p. 21, 24 Sept. 1954.

[13] *H.B.41*, p. 104, 16 Oct. 1973.

[14] *H.B.39*, p. 160, 3 Nov. 1966.

[15] *H.B.29*, p. 261, 31 May 1907.

[16] *H.B.31*, p. 135, 25 Nov. 1921.

[17] *H.B.34*, p. 136, 28 Nov. 1947; *H.B.38*, p. 273, 20 March 1963; *H.B.41*, p. 9, 18 Feb. 1972.

[18] *H.B.30*, p. 150, 30 Jan. 1914.

Vice-Presidents, and the Society gave £100 towards the cost of entertaining the Association, as it had done earlier in 1898.[19] On a number of occasions, hospitality was extended to members of the University Grants Committee.[20] In 1930, a donation was made towards the cost of entertaining the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, which was meeting in Bristol,[21] and 20 guineas were given in the same year towards the cost of a British-French Week.[22] Members of the Canadian Historical Association, who visited Bristol in 1934, were invited to luncheon,[23] as were members of the Royal Sanitary Institute.[24] In 1965, the Society agreed to lend some of its records to an exhibition commemorating Sir Ferdinando Gorges and also invited the Society of Archivists to visit the Hall.[25] On a number of occasions, officers of Royal Navy ships visiting Bristol have been entertained in the Hall,[26] and in 1973 the Society decided to adopt H.M.S. *Bristol*.[27] In the same year, it agreed to contribute £1,000 over ten years towards the restoration of the *Great Britain*.[28]

In various ways the Society has continued to show an interest in its own past and in places with which it has had historical connections. In 1909, for example, it received a letter from the Lord Mayor stating that the Historical Society of Newfoundland was raising a subscription in order to erect a memorial to John Guy. The Lord Mayor was proposing to inform "the Colonists" that the city would contribute £50 and he invited the Society to make a donation. It was agreed to give £100, provided the whole amount required was collected before the end of 1910.[29] The Newfoundland connection was further strengthened in 1965 when the Society gave to the city of St. John a gold badge and chain, which were taken to Newfoundland by Mr. and Mrs. Alan Wills. The first mayor of St. John's to wear the insignia was entertained in the Hall the following year.[30] Yet another link with the past was the entertaining of a deputation from Ontario in connection with the unveiling of a plaque commemorating Captain Thomas James, the seventeenth-century explorer of the North-West passage who had been backed by the Society.[31]

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[19] *H.B.32*, p. 83, 29 Nov. 1929; p. 92, 28 Feb. 1930; pp. 97, 98, 1 May 1930.

[20] *H.B.32*, p. 54, 31 May 1929; p. 313, 22 March 1934.

[21] *H.B.32*, p. 94, 28 March 1930.

[22] *H.B.32*, p. 97, 1 May 1930.

[23] *H.B.32*, p. 310, 23 Feb. 1934.

[24] *H.B.32*, p. 313, 22 March 1934.

[25] *H.B.39*, p. 34, 12 Feb. 1968.

[26] E.g. *H.B.32*, p. 105, 27 June 1930; p. 222, 17 June 1932.

[27] *H.B.41*, p. 72, 13 April 1973; p. 147, 18 July 1974.

[28] *H.B.41*, p. 79, 11 May 1973.

[29] *H.B.29*, p. 373, 29 Oct. 1909; p. 416, 24 June 1910. The appeal was over-subscribed and in the end the Society was asked to contribute only £50.

[30] *H.B.38*, p. 229, 13 Sept. 1963; *H.B.39*, p. 62, 29 April 1965; p. 84, 13 Aug. 1965; p. 133, 21 April 1966.

[31] *H.B.41*, p. 139, 17 May 1974. See p. 86.

More recent history was commemorated when the Society agreed to let the makers of a film on the Great Western Railway use the Banqueting Hall for a reconstruction of the first meeting of the Company in the Merchants' Hall.[32] Another railway link was the presentation to the Society in 1963 of the headboard used on the well-known train *The Merchant Venturer* which had run between Paddington and Bristol for ten years from 1951.[33]

Considering that the Merchant Venturers have played such an important part in the life of the city, it is surprising that their name has not been used for an inn or public house until very recently. There was, it is true, an inn known as *The Merchants' Arms* at the corner of Prince Street, very near the Hall, at least as early as 1689 and possibly much earlier. This was pulled down in 1936.[34] Two years later, the name of *The Merchants' Arms* was given to a public house in the area developed by the Society in Stapleton,[35] and more recently the Society agreed to the name *The Merchant Venturer* being used for the public house which replaced *The Ship* at Redcliffe Hill.[36]

The Society has over the years accumulated a very large number of treasures and valuable archives, some of which are on display for the benefit of members and visitors to the Hall. Largely as a result of the interest of the present Treasurer, plans are under consideration for making a small museum in the Hall, so that more of the relics and archives can be displayed than is possible at present.[37]

The Society has also been very much concerned in recent years with the preservation of its records and with making them more easily available to those engaged in historical research. Mr. R. H. Brown, who was appointed Honorary Librarian to the Society in 1968, reported the following year on the need to make microfilm copies of the priceless and unique *Hall Books of Proceedings* and suggested that some of the microfilms might be placed in the Bristol University Library and in the Bristol City Library. He also asked for the provision in the basement of a professionally-approved strong room for the archives. In 1971, Miss Elizabeth Ralph, the former City Archivist, was invited to catalogue the archives on a part-time basis.[38]

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[32] *H.B.32*, p. 354, 24 Jan. 1935. There was a private showing of the film in the Hall at the end of the year (*H.B.32*, p. 395, 29 Nov. 1935).

[33] *H.B.38*, p. 181, 8 Feb. 1963.

[34] C. W. F. Dening, *Old Inns of Bristol*, Bristol, 1949, pp. 44, 146.

[35] See p. 470.

[36] *H.B.40*, p. 19, 29 Dec. 1967.

[37] *H.B.40*, p. 224, 20 Nov. 1970; p. 238, 26 Feb. 1971; *H.B.41*, p. 17, 27 April 1972; p. 23, 12 May 1972; p. 33, 14 July 1972; p. 122, 24 Jan. 1974.

[38] *H.B.40*, pp. 126 ff., 9 May 1969; p. 142, 12 Sept. 1969; p. 164, 19 Dec. 1969; p. 215, 29 Oct. 1970; p. 258, 16 July 1971. The work of arranging and cataloguing the archives is still in progress.

As far as the general public is concerned, the Society has through much of its history seemed to be a somewhat remote and mysterious body whose main function was to give banquets for distinguished visitors and to maintain a splendid Hall for the benefit of its members. It was, moreover, thought to be immensely wealthy and very influential in the affairs of the city. On a number of occasions in the past, the Society has been fiercely criticised in the press. The realisation that there was a need to correct misunderstandings about its functions led the Society in 1964 to get professional advice on its relations with the press, "bearing in mind the need to inform the public of the real work of the Society and to disabuse the popular impression that it is merely an exclusive dining and wining club", and Mr. Eric Buston was appointed as part-time public relations officer.[39]

THE DOWNS

Under the Downs Act of 1861, control of the Downs continued to be exercised by a joint committee of the Corporation and the Society of Merchant Venturers, but the Society itself has on occasions been directly involved, since it has not given up the ownership of that part of the Downs which it dedicated to the use of the public.[40] When necessary, it made the position clear to the Corporation and even over-rode decisions made by the Downs Committee. In 1902, for example, when the Corporation gave permission for the Bath and West Agricultural Show to be held on the Downs in the following year, the Society informed the Town Clerk that it still retained ownership of the soil and that the Committee responsible for the show must make an agreement with the Society.[41] When the Downs Committee approved plans for a ranger's cottage and public lavatory behind Proctor's Fountain, the Society refused to accept them as they were considered unsuitable.[42] In 1912, the Hall agreed to the Royal Agricultural Show being held on the Downs, but when five telegraph poles were erected, it asked the Town Clerk by whose authority this had been done. He replied that it was due to "inadvertence" by a clerk, and it was agreed that they would be removed and the soil made good as soon the Show was over.[43] When the Bristol Tramway Company put up a noticeboard opposite the Clifton Down Hotel in 1919, the Town Clerk was told that any erection on the Downs required the Society's consent. The noticeboard was allowed to remain "as a matter of courtesy but not of right".[44] In the same year, permission was given to the Downs Committee to put on a temporary site a tank which had been presented to the city by the War Savings Committee, but in 1922, when war was out of fashion, the Town Clerk was asked to remove "this unsightly object" as soon as possible.[45]

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[39] *H.B.38*, p. 295, 30 July 1964; *H.B.39*, p. 5, 29 Oct. 1964; *H.B.40*, p. 90, 10 Jan. 1969.

[40] See p. 431.

[41] *H.B.29*, p. 1, 20 June 1902.

[42] *H.B.29*, p. 187, 27 April 1906.

[43] *H.B.30*, p. 66, 26 July 1912; p. 119, 20 June 1913.

[44] *H.B.30*, p. 408, 24 Jan. 1919; p. 423, 28 Feb. 1919.

It has not always been easy to maintain a satisfactory balance between preserving the natural beauty of the Downs and meeting the needs of the public. As the Clerk pointed out in 1954, the Act of 1861 required that Clifton Down, which belonged to the Society, and Durdham Down, which belonged to the Corporation, should be kept unenclosed as places of public resort and recreation. He said that he had heard it stated that the object of the Act was to preserve them in their natural state, and that they could not, for example, be converted into a formal city park, but this was not actually mentioned in the Act. He had doubts about whether the Downs Committee could authorise the holding of exhibitions and shows which resulted in even temporary enclosure.[46] As far as its part of the Downs was concerned, the Society was prepared to be as helpful as possible, provided the spirit of the Act was observed. It was willing to agree to agricultural and other shows being held on the Downs on condition that any damage to the soil was subsequently made good. It agreed in 1922 to convey to the Corporation a small piece of land near the Suspension Bridge which was required for a public lavatory,[47] and in 1929 it informed the Town Clerk that it would not object to cars being parked alongside the wall of the Zoological Gardens.[48]

In 1961, there were celebrations to mark the centenary of the Clifton and Durdham Down (Bristol) Act of 1861. The Suspension Bridge was illuminated and there was a display of fireworks. The Society entertained the Downs Committee and others to a Fork Supper before the celebrations.[49]

In the nineteen-sixties, a very controversial issue arose which placed the Society in a difficult position. Ironically, it was shortly after the celebration of the centenary of the Downs Act that the Planning Committee of the Corporation informed the Downs Committee that it was putting forward a proposal for a very large roundabout at the top of Black Boy Hill, which would involve considerable encroachment on the Downs. It must be remembered that the Corporation not only owned half the Downs but that it could, if necessary, seek to acquire the land it needed, from the Society by compulsory purchase. The Society and its representatives on the Downs Committee were not in favour of the roundabout and suggested other means of dealing with the traffic problems. There was much discussion, and the Corporation did not press its proposal at this time.[50] The matter came up again in 1965 when the City Engineer and the Planning and Public Works Committee raised it as a matter of urgency. This time the Downs Committee was convinced that the City Engineer's forecast about the traffic problem had proved correct and felt that the need was "so urgent that the Committee can no longer resist". Moreover, it pointed out that in the last resort, the Corporation could resort to compulsory purchase.[51] The issue aroused considerable feeling in Bristol, and there was vigorous protest from a number of amenity groups, including the Bristol Civic Society. The Society of Merchant Venturers tried to make its own position clear through the press. In November 1966, the Master reported that the Downs Committee had confirmed its original decision to accept the proposal in principle, but the Clerk pointed out that the Society could revoke its decision at any time and that it should have made it clear that its agreement was conditional on there being a public enquiry.[52] Rightly or wrongly, there was a feeling in Bristol that the Downs Committee, half of whose members were Merchant Venturers, and the Society, which owned the soil, ought to have resisted more vigorously. In the end, the matter went to a public enquiry, and as it was not possible to find another piece of land to add to the Downs in place of what was to be taken away by the roundabout, the Corporation did not proceed with its plans.[53]

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[45] *H.B.31*, p. 18, 19 Sept. 1919; p. 164, 28 July 1922.

[46] *H.B.36*, pp. 51 ff., 17 Dec. 1954.

[47] *H.B.31*, p. 166, 29 July 1922.

[48] *H.B.32*, p. 54, 31 May 1929.

[49] *H.B.38*, p. 20, 26 Jan. 1961.

Another problem which has caused considerable concern in recent years is the use of the Downs for parking cars, particularly when there is a very large number of visitors on Bank Holidays. The Downs Committee has authorised temporary car parks on occasions, but there is concern among members of the Society lest the practice spreads too much.[54]

THE CHURCH

On Charter Day, members of the Society attend an annual service at which a special sermon is preached, and throughout the period the Society has continued to show great interest in the work of the Church of England. It would be tedious to record the many and varied donations which it has made, but some of them may be noted in order to illustrate the range of help which has been given.

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[50] *H.B.38*, p. 57, 13 July 1961; p. 102, 11 Jan. 1962; p. 109, 9 Feb. 1962.

[51] *H.B.39*, p. 103, 28 Oct. 1963; p. 105, 29 Oct. 1965.

[52] *H.B.39*, p. 157, 30 Sept. 1966; p. 167, 18 Nov. 1966.

[53] *H.B.40*, p. 58, 13 Sept. 1968; p. 144, 26 Sept. 1969. The issues in this long-drawn-out controversy were complicated, and it is not possible here to examine the case for and against the roundabout.

[54] *H.B.40*, p. 43, 14 June 1968; p. 104, 21 March 1969.

A considerable amount has been donated to assist in building new churches. Thus, in 1904, when the Bishop of Bristol thanked the Society for its donation of £2,500 to the Church Extension Commission and pointed out that the need was still very pressing, the Society decided to make a further grant spread over a period of years.[55] In 1915, the annual donation to the Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance was increased to 100 guineas,[56] and in 1919 £500 was contributed to the Bishopric of Bristol Endowment Fund.[57] In 1925, the Society agreed to give £1,000 in four instalments to the Church Extension Fund. The next year, it accepted the Bishop's invitation to nominate two members of his Commission to enquire into the position of the City Churches and the question of whether any of their funds might be used for building churches in other more populous districts.[58] Another £1,000 was given for church extension in 1935, and the same amount was contributed in 1944 to the Bishop of Bristol's Appeal for Church Restoration and Expansion.[59]

There were numerous donations, large and small, to the work of repairing and restoring the churches of Bristol, ranging from £10 given to clean St. Jude's in 1906 to £5,000 to help restore the porch and tower of St. Stephen's in 1914.[60] 100 guineas was given to the Cathedral Restoration Fund in 1922 and again in 1923.[61] Donations of the same amount were made to help restore the roof of St. Stephen's in 1925.[62] Grants of 100 guineas for restoration of the Cathedral were made in 1930, in 1931 and in 1933,[63] and in 1964 the Society agreed to give £5,000 spread over ten years for the same purpose.[64]

Apart from helping in the restoration of old churches and the building of new ones, the Society made many miscellaneous gifts to the church. They included such donations as £25 to improve the Cathedral organ in 1904;[65] 10 guineas to re-hang the bells of St. Stephen's in 1906;[66] £50 to assist in building a mission room at Redfield, £50 to repair Colston's monument in All Saints', 5 guineas to help heat Dundry church and 10 guineas towards providing a motorboat for the missionary attached to the Seamen's Institute at Avonmouth in 1907;[67] £100 to help the Bishop of Bath and Wells buy Glastonbury Abbey in 1908;[68] 10 guineas to the Church of England Defence Fund in Wales when disestablishment was being proposed in 1912;[69] 20 guineas to the Bristol Diocesan Clergy Fund and £3 10s. to help alter the choir stall in Locking Church in 1916;[70] 5 guineas to the Church of England Men's Society Annual Conference in Bristol in 1925;[71] 5 guineas to help restore church property damaged in a hurricane in Antigua in 1928,[72] and 20 guineas to repair Bristol churches damaged in a gale in 1929.[73]

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[55] *H.B.29*, p. 86, 19 Feb. 1904.

[56] *H.B.30*, p. 225, 23 July 1915.

[57] *H.B.31*, p. 37, 28 Nov. 1919.

[58] *H.B.31*, p. 322, 18 Dec. 1925; pp. 333, 334, 26 March 1926.

[59] *H.B.32*, p. 362, 22 March 1935; *H.B.33*, p. 366, 26 Oct. 1944.

[60] *H.B.29*, p. 202, 27 July 1906; *H.B.30*, p. 179, 24 July 1914.

[61] *H.B.31*, p. 160, 29 June 1922; p. 270, 30 Jan. 1923.

[62] *H.B.31*, p. 318, 27 Nov. 1925.

[63] *H.B.32*, p. 116, 30 Oct. 1930; p. 158, 16 July 1931; p. 251, 26 Jan. 1933.

[64] *H.B.38*, p. 273, 20 March 1964.

[65] *H.B.29*, p. 98, 27 May 1904.

[66] *H.B.29*, p. 214, 26 Oct. 1906.

[67] *H.B.29*, p. 239, 4 Feb. 1907; p. 250, 22 March 1907.

Grants in recent years have included a seven-year covenant in 1970 to pay £75 per annum to the Social and Industrial Department of the diocese of Bristol;[74] £150 to Parkway Methodist Church to help with a home in St. Paul's for the relief of girls in distress;[75] £100 to All Saints' Appeal in 1972,[76] and an increase from 50 guineas to £75 of the annual contribution to the Clergy Stipend Fund.[77]

THE SOCIETY AND THE TWO WORLD WARS

When war broke out in August 1914, the immediate reaction of the Society was to call a special meeting which authorised a donation of 500 guineas to the Prince of Wales' National War Relief Fund and approved a motion that the Annual Dinner and Luncheon on Charter Day should be cancelled.[78] In the years that followed, some of its members were killed in action. Thus, in January 1915, the Hall mourned the early and untimely death of Lt. John Stanley Davey of the North Somerset Yeomanry, who died at Ypres.[79] In 1916, a presentation was made to Major Chester William Todd who had been awarded the D.S.O. He was killed in action at Ypres the next year.[80] A former Master of the Society, Captain Arthur Beadon Colthurst, fell in action in France in October 1916.[81] Another victim was Hugh Godfrey de Lisle Bush, M.C. In July 1915, the Society made a presentation to him on the occasion of his marriage and in recognition of the honours conferred on him for gallantry, but he died early in 1917 as a result of wounds received at the battle of Loos in October 1915.[82] Another member, Captain William Edgar Paul and his brother Major Courtenay Paul, D.S.O., sons of the Society's Surveyor, Walter S. Paul, were killed in action in 1917.[83]

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[68] *H.B.29*, p. 291, 24 Jan. 1908; p. 296, 28 Feb. 1908.

[69] *H.B.30*, p. 37, 23 Feb. 1912.

[70] *H.B.30*, p. 268, 26 May 1916; p. 277, 29 Sept. 1916.

[71] *H.B.31*, p. 279, 27 March 1925.

[72] *H.B.32*, p. 13, 26 Oct. 1928.

[73] *H.B.32*, p. 33, 25 Jan. 1929.

[74] *H.B.40*, p. 198, 22 May 1970.

[75] *H.B.40*, p. 228, 18 Dec. 1970.

[76] *H.B.41*, p. 9, 18 Feb. 1972.

[77] *H.B.41*, p. 56, 25 Jan. 1973.

[78] *H.B.30*, pp. 186, 188, 24 Aug. 1914.

[79] *H.B.30*, p. 209, 30 Jan. 1915. He had been admitted to the Society on 29 April 1911.

[80] *H.B.30*, p. 291, 22 Dec. 1916; p. 325, 14 Aug. 1917. He had been admitted to the Society on 30 Jan. 1909.

[81] *H.B.30*, p. 297, 27 Jan. 1917. He had been admitted in 1893 and had been Master 1912–13.

During these years, the Society contributed to the war effort in a variety of ways, some of which may be noted. It assisted by grants and loans the formation of Cadet Corps at Colston's School and at the Merchant Venturers' Technical College;[84] it gave 100 guineas to the Bristol Citizen's Recruiting Committee in 1914;[85] it agreed to the Triangle Hall, Park Place, being converted into a munitions factory,[86] and it invested some of its funds in War Loan.[87] In 1916, it contributed 200 guineas to the Lord Mayor's Fund to equip the Bristol Volunteer Regiment,[88] and it cooperated with the City's National Service Committee in its efforts to make more manpower available for the forces.[89] In 1917, it asked the Master and Wardens to attend at the tank in College Green to pay in £8,000 to buy National War Bonds.[90] Land was made available for allotments,[91] and substantial contributions were made during the war to the work of the Bristol Enquiry Bureau.[92] Luncheons after meetings of the Quarterly Hall and Standing Committee were to be "of the simplest description possible".[93]

In October 1914, a special sub-committee was set up to deal with donations to local battalions formed in consequence of the war, and in 1915 this was authorised to make grants of up to £50 for any purpose connected with the war.[94] Many gifts were made to provide comforts for the troops in or near Bristol, such as £20 given to each of the four organisations set up by the Church of England Men's Society to establish recreation and tea and coffee rooms for naval and military forces stationed in Bristol;[95] 50 guineas given to the Y.M.C.A. for a hut near Horfield Barracks in connection with Lord Derby's recruiting scheme in 1916,[96] and £100 given in 1917 to enlarge the Rest Home for Soldiers in Victoria Street.[97] The Bristol Red Cross Society was given £500 in 1917,[98] and there were a number of donations to the Bristol and Clifton War Hospital Depot in 1916, 1917 and 1918.[99] Gifts in kind included twenty-five dozen bottles of champagne sent to three War Hospitals in London and six dozen bottles of port and six dozen bottles of Burgundy sent to wounded officers in Southmead and Maudlin Street Hospitals in 1916.[100]

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[82] *H.B.30*, p. 223, 2 July 1915; p. 298, 27 Jan. 1917. He had been admitted to the Society on 30 Jan. 1909.

[83] *H.B.30*, p. 326, 14 Aug. 1917. William Edgar Paul had been admitted in 1895.

[84] *H.B.30*, p. 204, 18 Dec. 1914; p. 213, 26 March 1915; p. 215, 30 April 1915.

[85] *H.B.30*, p. 204, 18 Dec. 1914.

[86] *H.B.30*, p. 221, 25 June 1915.

[87] *H.B.30*, p. 222, 25 June 1915.

[88] *H.B.30*, p. 270, 30 June 1916.

[89] *H.B.30*, pp. 299, 300, 23 Feb. 1917.

[90] *H.B.30*, p. 349, 21 Dec. 1917.

[91] *H.B.30*, p. 301, 30 March 1917.

[92] *H.B.30*, p. 244, 17 Dec. 1915 (£250); p. 288, 24 Nov. 1916 (£250); p. 361, 4 Feb. 1918 (£250).

[93] *H.B.30*, p. 361, 4 Feb. 1918.

[94] *H.B.30*, p. 191, 30 Oct. 1914; p. 242, 26 Nov. 1915.

[95] *H.B.30*, p. 200, 27 Nov. 1914.

[96] *H.B.30*, p. 255, 26 Feb. 1916.

[97] *H.B.30*, p. 300, 23 Feb. 1917.

[98] *H.B.30*, p. 293, 24 Jan. 1917.

Contributions to miscellaneous charities connected with the war included £10 a month to help Bristol naval prisoners of war and £10 a month to the Bristol Belgian Refugee Fund;[101] 10 guineas to a fund for "alleviating the sufferings of the brave and unfortunate countries of Serbia and Montenegro";[102] £25 to the Russian Red Cross;[103] 5 guineas to the Ladies' Guild of the Bristol Sailors' Home for groceries to be sent to Bristol seamen interned at Ruhleben;[104] and 5 guineas to the Bristol Italian Red Cross Fund.[105]

There was little entertaining in the Hall during the war years, but it may be noted that in March 1917 the Master reported that he had given a luncheon for Colonel Paulett and other officers of the 128th Canadian (Moose Jaw) Battalion and that the Colonel had promised to send the Society a set of badges and buttons of the regiment.[106]

After the war, the Society decided to invite Colonel Daniel Burges, V.C. to become a member as a redemptioner.[107] It contributed £100 towards the City's Peace Celebrations and gave £100 each to Colston's School, Colston's Girls' School and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College for the same purpose.[108] In due course, it conferred the freedom on two of the war leaders, Sir David Beatty and Earl Haig, but not on Mr. David Lloyd George.

In the First World War, the Society had not been unduly worried about possible damage to its property from enemy action. In September 1915, it decided that it was not necessary to participate in the government's scheme for insurance against damage by enemy aircraft and bombardment, but in February 1916 it felt that the time had now come to do so.[109] In the Second World War, the position was very different, and air-raid precautions were taken before the war began. In 1940 and 1941, the Merchants' Hall was destroyed by enemy action, and the Society was forced to find temporary quarters in The St. Monica Home of Rest.[110] In 1940, in view of the critical situation, the Charter Day Service was held in the chapel of Colston's

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[99] *H.B.30*, p. 279, 27 Oct. 1916 (£50); p. 333, 26 Oct. 1917 (£100); p. 381, 28 June 1918 (£100).

[100] *H.B.30*, p. 263, 28 April 1916; p. 272, 28 July 1916.

[101] *H.B.30*, p. 243, 17 Dec. 1915.

[102] *H.B.30*, p. 255, 26 Feb. 1916.

[103] *H.B.30*, p. 288, 24 Nov. 1916.

[104] *H.B.30*, p. 315, 25 May 1917.

[105] *H.B.30*, p. 371, 26 April 1918.

[106] *H.B.30*, p. 301, 30 March 1917.

[107] *H.B.30*, p. 425, 28 Feb. 1919.

[108] *H.B.31*, p. 7, 27 June 1919; p. 17, 19 Sept. 1919.

[109] *H.B.30*, p. 229, 24 Sept. 1915; p. 254, 3 Feb. 1916.

[110] See p. 460.

Almshouse instead of in St. Stephen's, and it was decided not to invite the children from Colston's schools or the almsfolk.[111] The next year, the service was held in the chapel of St. Monica's.[112]

Although a number of members of the Society were on active service in the Second World War, none of them was killed. However, the Treasurer, Mr. G. H. Beloe, lost two sons in the war and died himself in 1944.[113]

As in World War I, the Society contributed in various ways to the war effort. Contributions to numerous appeals included 100 guineas each to the Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance Corps in 1939; 300 guineas to the Y.M.C.A. in Bristol in connection with its work for the forces and £250 to the Lord Mayor's War Services Fund in 1940.[114] In 1940, the Society contributed to the work of the Anglo-French Ambulance Corps and to the Finland Appeal.[115] It gave 50 guineas to Aid to Russia Week in November 1941; 20 guineas to the Lord Mayor's Appeal for Aid to China in 1942; 50 guineas to the Four Nations Appeal in 1943, and 100 guineas to an Appeal for the Royal and Merchant Navies in 1945.[116] Less conventional donations included £150 to the Rev. P. B. Clayton for Toc H to provide a shooting brake bearing the Society's name to transport patients and stores in the Orkneys in 1940,[117] and a grant of up to £220 in 1942 to enable the Gloucestershire Territorial Association to provide a mobile cinema for isolated anti-aircraft units around Bristol.[118]

In support of the war effort, the Society invested £1,000 in National War Bonds in Bristol's War Weapons Week in 1940,[119] and nearly £10,000 during Bristol's Warship Week in December 1941.[120] It made a grant of 100 guineas to the Navy League Sea Cadet Corps in 1941;[121] it agreed to the Clifton Rocks Railway tunnel being used in connection with air-raid precautions,[122] and it made land available for air-raid shelters and allotments.[123] The Observatory was used by the Home Guard;[124] temporary accommodation in the Hall was made available to the Red Cross Society when its premises were damaged by enemy action,[125] and both during and after the war, a very considerable number of patients were treated in temporary accommodation made available in The St. Monica Home of Rest.[126]

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[111] *H.B.33*, p. 202, 27 Sept. 1940.

[112] *H.B.33*, p. 246, 26 Sept. 1941.

[113] See p. 452.

[114] *H.B.33*, p. 157, 25 Oct. 1939; p. 178, 23 Feb. 1940; p. 198, 24 July 1940. Other donations to the Y.M.C.A. included 100 guineas in 1944 and £500 in 1945 (*H.B.33*, pp. 350, 413, 27 April 1944 and 26 July 1945). Fifty guineas were given to the Salvation Army Emergency Service in 1942 (*H.B.33*, p. 283, 25 Sept. 1942).

[115] *H.B.33*, p. 173, 24 Jan. 1940; p. 181, 21 March 1940.

[116] *H.B.33*, p. 256, 28 Nov. 1941; p. 283, 25 Sept. 1942; p. 327, 28 Oct. 1943; p. 388, 25 Jan. 1945.

[117] *H.B.33*, p. 192, 31 May 1940; p. 195, 28 June 1940.

[118] *H.B.33*, p. 276, 26 June 1942; p. 278, 29 July 1942.

[119] *H.B.33*, p. 202, 27 Sept. 1940.

[120] *H.B.33*, p. 248, 29 Oct. 1941.

[121] *Ibid.*

[122] *H.B.33*, p. 155, 29 Sept. 1939; p. 228, 31 Jan. 1941.

[123] *H.B.33*, p. 170, 24 Nov. 1940; p. 179, 23 Feb. 1940; p. 196, 20 June 1940; p. 198, 24 July 1940.

[124] See p. 475.

When the War was over, the Society decided to offer the freedom to two of the architects of victory, Sir Winston Churchill and General Dwight D. Eisenhower.[127]

OTHER INTERESTS

As has been noted earlier, the Society in the nineteenth century had taken shares in the Leigh Woods Land Company whose object was to preserve the woods for the benefit of the citizens of Bristol.[128] In 1905, it received a legacy from the late Mr. A. Capper Pass of 135 additional shares in the Company.[129] In 1909, Mr. G. A. Wills informed the Hall that he had purchased for the benefit of the Company 73 acres, including Nightingale Valley and the Hanging Wood. He had paid the purchase price from his own money, but he wished to set up a Sustentation Fund to preserve the woods and he asked the Society to help. The Hall was willing to contribute £500 and also to hand over the shares which it had received from Mr. Capper Pass. In the end, G. A. Wills accepted the shares for the Sustentation Fund but decided he would make up the fund from his own resources.[130]

After the First World War when there was a serious housing shortage, the Society decided to help by taking up 500 ordinary £1 shares in Bristol Housing Ltd. When the Company was wound up in 1934, the surplus received by the Society was used to help pay the cost of an additional ward at Winford Orthopaedic Hospital for Sick Children.[131]

In the nineteen-twenties when unemployment was a major problem, there were many schemes to assist emigration, and the Society cooperated by making the Hall available to those concerned and by giving donations towards the work of the Bristol Migration Committee.[132]

In 1929 and again in 1931, the Clifton Suspension Bridge Company asked the Society whether it would sell the shares which it held in the Company, but the Hall was unwilling to end this link with the past, which dated back to the eighteenth century when William Vick made it trustee of a fund intended to finance the building of a bridge over the Avon.[133]

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[125] *H.B.33*, p. 215, 29 Nov. 1940.

[126] In 1950, it was reported that 15,487 patients had been treated in the General Hospital annexe since this had been at St. Monica's. *H.B.35*, p. 27, 24 Nov. 1950.

[127] See p. 447.

[128] See p. 443.

[129] *H.B.29*, p. 153, 27 Oct. 1905.

[130] *H.B.29*, p. 337, 29 Jan. 1909; p. 345, 26 Feb. 1909.

[131] *H.B.31*, p. 221, 30 Nov. 1923; *H.B.32*, p. 345, 30 Nov. 1934.

[132] *H.B.31*, p. 432, 23 March 1928; p. 441, 18 May 1928; *H.B.32*, p. 70, 18 Oct. 1929; p. 94, 28 March 1930.

The Society has also continued to subscribe to the Bristol Chamber of Commerce which in the nineteenth century had taken over much of the work once carried out by the Merchant Venturers. In 1916, it agreed to raise its annual subscription from £50 to £100, the amount it had contributed during the period 1851–86.[134] The Hall was, however, unwilling to become involved in 1969 in the controversial issue of the future of the Bristol City Docks, and it informed the Chamber that "as the Society was not a commercial undertaking it should not itself express an opinion to the Chamber of Commerce on this, although the individual members may do so in their several capacities".[135]

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[133] *H.B.32*, p. 54, 31 May 1929; p. 151, 29 May 1931.

[134] *H.B.30*, p. 259, 31 March 1916.

[135] *H.B.40*, p. 160, 21 Nov. 1969. See also *H.B.38*, p. 109, 9 Feb. 1962, for a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce over plans to preserve the beauty of Ashton Court.

CHAPTER 28

Past, Present and Future

THE Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol has undergone many changes since, as a group of would-be monopolists, it first obtained a royal charter in 1552 in order to further the trade of Bristol in general and the interests of its own members in particular.

In the seventeenth century, it was primarily a pressure group concerned, above all, with economic matters and with the port of Bristol. The main source of its limited income was the wharfage dues which had been handed over to it in return for a nominal rent by the Corporation, with which it was closely associated. In the later part of the century, it bought the manor of Clifton which in the long run was to prove extremely profitable. Even in this early period, its charitable and educational activities were of some significance, and the Merchants' Almshouse and the school for the children of poor mariners were a foundation for much more extensive activities in the following centuries.

In the eighteenth century, the main concern of the Society was still trade and economic affairs in general, and in these fields its work reached a peak and began to decline before the end of the century. The property became of increasing significance as Bristol expanded into Clifton. The income from the wharfage lease, which the Hall held on extremely favourable terms, helped it to undertake the development of the port, and it acquired the Merchants' Dock and adjacent property in Hotwells. There was a very considerable extension of its educational work when, early in the century, Edward Colston made it trustee for Colston's Hospital and the estates which provided an income for the school. It also became responsible for a second almshouse, and the establishment of the Seamen's Hospital Fund in the mid-eighteenth century gave it the management of an important welfare scheme for Bristol seamen.

During the early nineteenth century, the Society's interest in the business life of Bristol decreased, and the foundation of a Chamber of Commerce in the eighteen-twenties was but one indication that the business community was looking elsewhere for leadership. Both central and local government began to take over work which had hitherto been carried out by the Society. The Seamen's Hospital Fund was taken away by Act of Parliament. The Society lost control of the cranes and the pilots, and eventually had to surrender its wharfage lease. The end of the old regime was symbolised in the eighteen-forties by its unsuccessful attempt to find a new source of income through the Waterworks scheme and by the traumatic experience of the litigation which resulted in a decision that the manor of Stogursey belonged, not to the Society, but to the Colston Trust. The long Treasurership of William Claxton saw the end of the old order and the beginning of the new, as the Society changed its image and began to adapt itself to a new age.

To make good the loss of income resulting from the surrender of the wharfage lease, the Society intensified its interest in property-development and in so doing left its mark on the face of Bristol.

Educational work became of increasing importance. From the later eighteen-thirties, the Society was busy improving the work of Colston's Hospital, and in 1861 the school was moved to Stapleton. However, the Society was not allowed to develop the school in its own way, and the new Governmental Scheme of 1873, which was basically imposed from above, altered the whole character of the school and ended the direct control which the Society had exercised from the early eighteenth century.

Once again, the Society tried to adapt itself to change. In 1885, it took over the Trade and Mining School, which it eventually transformed into the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, an institution which rivalled University College, Bristol, and from which hived off in the twentieth century a preparatory school, a secondary school, a college of commerce and a Faculty of Engineering.

In the twentieth century the Merchant Venturers' Technical College reached the height of its fame, but the cost of providing technical education was far beyond the resources of a private body with limited resources, and the College was to a very large extent financed by grants from public authorities. It was inevitable that sooner or later those who provided the bulk of the money would want to take over control, and in 1949 the Society ceased to be responsible for the Technical College. For some sixty-five years this remarkable pioneering work, like the Seamen's Hospital Fund in an earlier period, had helped to justify the existence of the Society. Although the College now passed into other hands, the Society still retained its interest in education through its close association with the University of Bristol and with the two Colston's schools.

The end of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College meant a contraction of interest in one field, but there had, on the other hand, been a remarkable expansion in the Society's charitable role when in 1922 the Merchant Venturers became responsible for the administration of the very considerable endowments settled by H. H. Wills on The St. Monica Home of Rest. Management of these endowments and participation in the Council of the Home was to be a major preoccupation of the Society and its members in the years that followed.

Throughout its history, the Society has been forced to adapt itself to new situations as it lost some of its old functions and had to find new ones. The point was made very clearly by W. W. Ward, one of the Society's greatest Treasurers, when he wrote to the Master in 1908: "The S.M.V. is an anachronism in this sense, that it is an institution which has survived its original purpose. Such institutions are at the present time regarded always with criticism, often, particularly when they hold property, with jealousy. To justify their existence, it is advisable that they should undertake new public services when their original duties have ceased. . . ."[1] Ward had in mind the threat which appeared to be presented to the work of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College by the proposed University of Bristol, but the point he made about the need for the Society to justify its existence by continually re-assessing its role in a changing world has been grasped, explicitly or implicitly, during much of the Society's long history. At times, the Society has been slow to adapt itself and has appeared to the public as a complacent group of men concerned primarily with their own affairs. It has been considered, wrongly, to be an exclusive wining and dining club with great wealth. It has not always taken steps to make its work known to the public and has seemed like some Victorian or Edwardian lady "terribly sure of her rightful place in a world she saw no need to please". At times, it has been characterised by self-assurance and self-righteousness, but, taking the record as a whole, there can be little doubt that it has always shown a capacity to adapt itself to change and to seek continually new means of serving the community.

In recent years, the Society has been very conscious of the need to examine critically its work and its aims. The development of the National Health Service and the growth of the Welfare State have inevitably raised the question of whether the traditional forms of philanthropy with which the Society has been concerned are those best suited to needs of the present day and whether the St. Monica's trust, which was first established over fifty years ago, ought not to be modified and adapted to a world very different from that of 1922. Fundamental changes in national and local educational policy have also raised major problems about the role of the two Colston's schools with which the Society has always had such a close relationship.

With these and other problems in mind, the Hall set up in 1969 a special sub-committee to consider what the objects of the Society should be in the next ten to twenty years and what changes should be made in its policy.[2] This developments sub-committee has examined carefully the position concerning The St. Monica Trust and the two Colston's schools and has also considered a number of suggestions about other possible fields of activity, such as the practicability of establishing a new home for terminal cases, of encouraging the formation of a Housing Association in one of the districts of Bristol, of helping the young through youth clubs and the Outward Bound movement, and of improving the amenities of Bristol and preserving what can be preserved of its past.[3] Some of these proposals proved on investigation to be impracticable. It was estimated, for example, that the capital cost of establishing a new home for terminal cases would be about half a million pounds,[4] and this was far beyond the Society's limited resources, particularly as it felt it had a moral obligation to help the two schools as well as numerous other organisations. There were, too, very great problems about backing a Housing Association.

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[1] Merchants' Hall: *M.V. University Papers*, W. W. Ward to the Master, March 1908.

[2] *H.B.40*, p. 97, 7 Feb. 1969.

The attempt to re-assess the role of the Society in the modern world still continues. Among its results so far have been the modernisation and development of The St. Monica Home of Rest and the establishment of a new Merchant Venturers' Charitable Trust which is intended to build up a fund which will, in due course, enable the Society to contribute generously to local good causes to which at present it can make only relatively small donations.[5] In these and other ways the Society is seeking to justify in the widest sense of the words its motto *Indocilis pauperiem pati.*

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[3] For various reports and discussions concerning future policy, see *H.B.40*, p. 110, 31 March 1969; pp. 131–3, 23 June 1969; p. 143, 12 Sept. 1969; p. 149, 20 Oct. 1969; p. 169, 29 Oct. 1969; p. 180, 16 March 1970; p. 196, 8 May 1970; p. 198, 22 May 1970; p. 208, 31 July 1970; p. 211, 24 Sept. 1970; *H.B.41*, pp. 20 ff., 8 May 1972; p. 67, 9 April 1973; p. 72, 13 April 1973; p. 87, 26 July 1973; p. 127, 11 March 1974; p. 132, 29 March 1974; p. 146, 18 July 1974.

[4] *H.B.40*, p. 180, 16 March 1970.

[5] The proposal originated for Mr. Roger Clarke. See *H.B.40*, p. 271, 28 Sept. 1971; p. 284, 26 Nov. 1971; *H.B.41*, p. 69, 9 April 1973; p. 93, 24 Sept. 1973; p. 114, 7 Dec. 1973; p. 125, 22 Feb. 1974.

APPENDIX A

Register of Members 1800–1974

For lists of members in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see McGrath, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 26–33 and Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, pp. 209–16.

The following list of members in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been compiled from the *Hall Books*.

H.B.13			
p. 139	29 May	1800	George Hilhouse, s. of James Martin Hilhouse
p. 186	6 Nov.	1801	Samuel Whitchurch, s. of Samuel Whitchurch
p. 196	11 Mar.	1802	George Gibbs, s. of George Gibbs Henry Protheroe, app. of Edward Protheroe
p. 209	10 May	1802	Henry Addington, Chancellor of the Exchequer (Honorary Member)
p. 218	25 Aug.	1802	Benjamin Bickley. Fine £200
p. 237	24 Jan.	1803	John Vaughan, app. of brother Richard Vaughan
p. 256	22 Aug.	1803	H. R. H. Ernest Augustus, Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale, Earl of Armagh (Hon. Member) Presented September 1803
p. 265	17 Sept.	1803	William Gibbons, Anthony Palmer Collings, William Holder, James George, Thomas Hellicar, Joseph Hellicar, Charles Anderson, Robert Bruce, Richard Hart Davis, Henry Brooke, John Haythorne, William Danson, Robert Bush, William Perry, John Britten Bence, John Thomson, Robert Vizer, John Barrow, Charles Harvey (These 19 members were admitted at a reduced fine of £150)
p. 273	15 Oct.	1803	Philip Protheroe, s. of late Mr. Protheroe

HB.13			
	8 Nov.	1804	Henry, (1st) Lord Viscount Melville (*Book of Petitions*, p. 134)
p. 360	28 Nov.	1805	Admiral Lord Barham (Hon. Member)
			Admiral Lord Collingwood (Hon. Member)
p. 434	21 Feb.	1807	Thomas Durbin Brice, s. and app. of Edward Brice
p. 457	13 June	1807	Robert Hilhouse, Abraham Hilhouse (sons of James Martin Hilhouse)
			Butler Thompson Claxton, app. of Philip Protheroe (*H.B.13*, p. 114)
p. 464	12 Oct.	1807	Moved that the Freedom be presented in a gold box to H. R. H. George, Prince of Wales
			(Letter to Equerry dated 12 Oct. 1807 and entry in *Merchants' Hall Ledger 1795–1808*, Paid to Henry Browne for a gold box to be presented to the Prince of Wales with the Freedom, £73 10s. 0d.)
H.B.14			
p. 35	10 Nov.	1808	Benjamin Hayward Bright on payment of the usual fees
p. 101	24 Jan.	1810	James Joseph Whitchurch, s. of Samuel Whitchurch
p. 111	4 July	1810	John Latty Bickley, app. of his father, Benjamin Bickley
p. 133	7 Nov.	1810	James George, s. of James George
pp. 148/9	16 Jan.	1811	Robert Willis Vizer, app. of his father, Robert Vizer
p. 191	14 April	1812	Henry Bright, s. of Richard Bright
p. 194	14 April	1812	Thomas Paul Perkins, s. of Thomas Perkins
p. 233	4 Feb.	1813	Edward Perkins, s. of Thomas Perkins
p. 243	21 May	1813	John Evans Lunell, s. of William Peter Lunell
p. 275	10 Nov.	1813	Daniel Cave, s. of Stephen Cave
	10 Nov.	1813	Robert Bruce the younger, app. of his father, Robert Bruce
p. 282	18 Nov.	1813	James Fowler the younger, s. of James Fowler
p. 292	20 April	1814	Ordered that the Freedom be presented to Mr. Hart Davis and his eldest son (it does not seem to

			have been presented and they did not attend any meetings)
p. 306	11 Aug.	1814	Edward Hinton, app. of his uncle, Thomas Hellicar
p. 319	8 Nov.	1814	Henry Wenham Newman, app. of John Thomson to whom he paid a premium of £300.
pp. 336/7	30 Mar.	1815	George Lunell, s. of William Peter Lunell
p. 364	1 Sept.	1815	Robert Claxton, app. of his brother Butler Thompson Claxton to whom he paid a premium of £500
p. 372	8 Nov.	1815	Ordered that the Freedom be presented to (2nd) Viscount Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty
p. 388	3 May	1816	Samuel Lunell, s. of Peter Lunell
p. 402	25 July	1816	Voted that the Freedom be granted to Field-Marshal, His Grace The Duke of Wellington (conferred on him during his visit to Bristol 27 July 1816)[1]
p. 413	8 Nov.	1816	Voted that the Freedom be presented to Lord Edward Somerset and Lord (James Henry) Fitzroy Somerset (1st Baron Raglan)
p. 460	7 Nov.	1817	Peter Maze. Fine £200
p. 462	7 Nov.	1817	Edmond Danson, app. of his father William Danson
			Francis Bickley, app. of his father Benjamin Bickley
pp. 534/5	4 Feb.	1819	Richard Walker Fowler, s. of Richard Sargeant Fowler
H.B.15			
p. 27	7 Oct.	1819	Martin Hilhouse, s. of James Martin Hilhouse
p. 32	13 Oct.	1819	James Maze. Fine £200
p. 43	6 Nov.	1819	Hugh William Danson. Fine £200
	6 Nov.	1819	Rice Williams Price, app. of Charles Harvey
	6 Nov.	1819	Henry George Fowler, s. of Richard Sargeant Fowler
p. 67	14 Feb.	1820	William Bruce and Robert Rainey, app. of Robert Bruce

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[1] The gold box in which the Freedom was presented is now in Apsley House.

H.B.15			
p. 107	13 Oct.	1820	Henry Crane Brice, app. of his father Samuel Brice John William Fowler, s. of William Fowler
p. 182	2 Oct.	1821	Richard Dawbney Brice, app. of his father, Samuel Brice
p. 215	5 Feb.	1822	William Claxton, app. of his brother, Thompson Claxton
pp. 272/3	8 Nov.	1822	Thomas Daniel the younger, s. of Thomas Daniel
p. 323	14 June	1823	Alfred Fowler, s. of William Fowler
p. 332	4 Aug.	1823	Charles Withington Barrow, s. of John Barrow
p. 347	7 Nov.	1823	John Elton Lury, app. of uncle, Samuel Harford
H.B.16			
p. 14	11 Jan.	1825	Voted that the Freedom be presented to the Rt. Hon. Earl of Liverpool and the Rt. Hon. George Canning (Presented 12 Jan. 1825, *ibid.*, p. 16)
p. 34	22 Feb.	1825	Richard Summers Harford, app. to his father, the late James Harford.
	22 Feb.	1825	Summers Harford, app. of his uncle, Samuel Harford.
	22 Feb.	1825	Charles Lloyd Harford, app. of his uncle, Samuel Harford
p. 153	22 Feb.	1825	Danvers Hill Ward, app. of Peter Maze to whom he paid a premium of £300
p. 164	4 Oct.	1826	Peter Maze, s. of Peter Maze
p. 198	6 April	1827	Valentine Hellicar, app. of his father Thomas Hellicar
p. 328	5 June	1829	Edward Bevan. Fine of £200. Required to produce proof of his Freedom of the City which he did on 3 July 1829
p. 394	11 June	1830	Hall accepted resignation in writing from Edward Thurston Davis and voted that he be admitted into Colston's Almshouse and given £10 towards furnishing his room.[2]
p. 433	9 Nov.	1830	Robert Gay Barrow and James Syms

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[2] Edward Thurston Davis had been admitted a member on 10 Nov. 1786 (Minchinton, *Politics and the Port*, p. 215).

			Barrow, both sons and apprentices of John Barrow
H.B.17			
p. 112	4 July	1832	John Hellicar, s. of Thomas Hellicar
p. 174	18 Oct.	1833	William Brice s. and app. of William Diaper Brice
p. 260	3 Sept.	1834	Freedom to be presented to Henry Charles Somerset, Lord Granville
p. 384	20 April	1836	Francis Savage the younger, app. of his uncle, William Claxton
H.B.18			
p. 229	24 Aug.	1838	John Harding, William Edward Acraman, William Thomas Poole King, Daniel Wade Acraman, John Savage, John Salmon, William Weaver Davies, William Orchard Gwyer, Alfred John Acraman, Charles Pinney, John Hurle, Frederick Ricketts, Edward Drew, Richard Jenkins Poole King, James Norroway Franklyn, Richard Robinson, Joseph Bell Clarke, Christopher George, George Woodroffe Franklyn. Admitted on payment of reduced fine of £50[3]
p. 419	15 Feb.	1840	Ordered that the Freedom be presented to Henry Somerset, (7th) Duke of Beaufort
p. 451	1 June	1840	Mark Davis Protheroe, s. of Philip Protheroe
H.B.19			
p. 157	6 Oct.	1841	Henry Brice, s. of William Diaper Brice
p. 174	8 Nov.	1841	George Thorne George, s. of James George
p. 264	13 July	1842	Freedom to be presented to H.R.H. Prince Albert on his coming to Bristol for the launching of the *Great Britain* on 19 July

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[3] See p. 251. Fourteen signed the book on 26 October 1838 (*H.B.18*, p. 255), 4 on 8 Nov. 1838 (*H.B.18*, p. 267), and 1 on 10 Nov. 1838 (*H.B.18*, p. 274). John Vining who had been elected on 26 October was subsequently found to be ineligible as he was not a freeman of Bristol. D. W. Acraman was unable to attend on 26 October owing to illness and the book was taken to his home for signature.

H.B.20			
p. 39	18 Oct.	1844	Samuel Lunell, s. of George Lunell
p. 121	14 June	1845	George Grant, app. of Peter Maze the younger, to whom he paid a premium of £300
p. 260	2 Oct.	1846	George Pope, s. of the late Andrew Pope, born after his father's admission. To pay 40/– as a redemptioner
p. 286	15 Jan.	1847	James Thorne George, s. of James George
H.B.21			
p. 114	20 Feb.	1851	Voted that the freedom be presented to Philip William Skynner Miles, M.P. for the city (Hon. member)[4]
p. 133	25 April	1851	Robert Podmore Clark, app. of the late Robert Bruce to whom he paid a premium of £300
p. 186	21 Oct.	1851	George Piercy Whittall. Fine £50
pp. 186/7	21 Oct.	1851	Frederick William Green. Fine £50
pp. 219/20	27 Feb.	1852	William Oliver Bigg. Fine £50
	27 Feb.	1852	William Hopton Wyld. Fine £50
	27 Feb.	1852	John Hopton Wyld. Fine £50
	27 Feb.	1852	Charles Ringer. Fine £50
pp. 234/5	15 May	1852	James Hassell. Fine £50
	15 May	1852	Francis Kentucky Barnes. Fine £50
	15 May	1852	John Averay Jones. Fine £50
	15 May	1852	Thomas Lucas. Fine £50
	15 May	1852	Edmund Gwyer. Fine £50
p. 252	22 Sept.	1852	Charles Bowles Hare. Fine £50
	22 Sept.	1852	John Hare. Fine £50
	22 Sept.	1852	Thomas Porter Jose. Fine £50
pp. 265/6	6 Nov.	1852	John Lucas. Fine £50
p. 310	20 April	1853	James Bush. Fine £50
p. 336	28 Oct.	1853	Washington Fox, s. of Edward Long Fox, deceased, as app. of Francis Savage to whom he paid a premium of £300
p. 378	12 April	1854	Philip George, the younger, porter brewer, s. of Alfred George, porter

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[4] On 28 Oct. 1971, the Treasurer reported the purchase at Sotheby's for £720 of the box in which the freedom had been presented to Mr. Miles. The Treasurer stated that "the workmanship was splendid in the revolting fashion of the period", and that from his researches it seemed that the freedom had been presented in a box on only 10 occasions and that this was one of the two boxes presented to commoners.

			brewer, app. of Christopher George, lead merchant, a Merchant Venturer
p. 379	12 April	1854	George Rogers, alkali manufacturer. Fine £50
pp. 391/2	13 May	1854	His Grace Henry Charles Fitzroy (8th) Duke of Beaufort (Hon. member)
p. 449	9 Jan.	1855	Ordered that the Freedom be presented to Robert Bright. (It was conveyed to him on 8 July 1855. *H.B.21*, p. 501)
p. 450	9 Jan.	1855	William Fripp, junior. Fine £50
H.B.22			
pp. 2/3	3 Nov.	1855	Edward Thomas Lucas. Fine £50
	13 Sept.	1856	William Adlam. Fine £50
p. 98	4 Nov.	1856	Ordered that the Freedom be presented to the Rt. Hon. The (2nd) Baron Raglan in respect of his father and his Somerset connection. It was not in fact presented to him until 6 August 1857 (*H.B.22*, p. 176)
pp. 196/7	3 Nov.	1857	Frederick Wake Pinney, s. of Charles Pinney
pp. 276/7	18 Sept.	1858	Robert Hilhouse Bush, s. of Henry Bush, deceased, app. of his father 24 March 1851–6 May 1857, then turned over to James Bush to 24 March 1858
pp. 277/8	18 Sept.	1858	Robert Withington Barrow, s. of Robert Gay Barrow. To pay 4/6d.
pp. 284/5	8 Nov.	1858	John Acraman, s. and app. of William Edward Acraman. To pay 4/6d.
p. 339	8 Mar.	1859	Philip Culpepper Claxton, s. of William Claxton
p. 396	4 Nov.	1859	William Wilberforce Jose, s. and app. of his father Thomas Porter Jose
pp. 397/8	4 Nov.	1859	Thomas Barnes George Mountfort Barnes Robert Grey Barnes All sons and apprentices of Francis Kentucky Barnes from 19 Oct. 1852.
p. 429	24 Feb.	1860	Sholto Vere Hare, son of Charles Hare and app. of William Thomas Poole King from 26 Nov. 1852. To pay £25 to the Treasurer

H.B.22		
pp. 430/1	24 Feb. 1860	Odiarne Coates Lane, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 430/1	24 Feb. 1860	Charles Paul, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 2/3	3 April 1860	John Frederick Lucas, s. of Thomas Lucas, deceased, app. of his father for 26 Feb. 1853–1 Aug. 1856 and then by turnover until 26 Feb. 1860 of his uncle John Lucas
p. 3	3 April 1860	John William Miles, s. of Philip John Miles, deceased, born after his father's admission
p. 103	16 Feb. 1861	George Henry Pope, s. of George Pope.
pp. 103/4	16 Feb. 1861	William Proctor Baker. Fine £50
p. 146	10 Aug. 1861	Edward Peach William Miles, s. of Philip John Miles, born after his father's admission
p. 146	10 Aug. 1861	Henry Cruger William Miles, s. of Philip John Miles, born after his father's admission
p. 183	11 Jan. 1862	Charles Peter Branstrom Howell, merchant. Fine £50
H.B.23		
pp. 209/10	26 April 1862	Richard Robinson Bevan, s. of John Scudamore Bevan, nephew and app. of Richard Robinson
pp. 239/40	3 Nov. 1862	Robert William Bigg, s. of William Oliver Bigg. Fine £50
pp. 240/1	3 Nov. 1862	William Bigg, s. and app. of William Bigg
pp. 274/5	4 April 1863	Donald Maclean Claxton, s. of William Claxton, born after his father's admission. To pay 4/6d.
pp. 332/3	14 Jan. 1864	Philip William Skynner Miles, s. of Philip John Miles, deceased, M.V. To pay 4/6d. as son of a member born after his father's admission to S.M.V. He is to take precedence so that he stands where he would have stood had his present admission taken place at the time when he was admitted an honorary member (See *H.B.21*, p. 114 20 Feb. 1851)
pp. 353/5	2 April 1864	Robert Henry Salmon, s. of John

			Salmon, born after his father's admission. To pay 40s. because his father was a redemptioner
p. 368	6 June	1864	Thomas Terrett Taylor, merchant (the printed notice says goldsmith) Fine £50
pp. 396/8	7 Nov.	1864	Arthur William King, s. of William Thomas Poole King, born after his father's admission. To pay 40/– because his father was a redemptioner
pp. 417/18	21 Jan.	1865	George King Morgan. Fine £50
H.B.24			
p. 26	28 Oct.	1865	William Augustus Frederick Powell, glass bottle manufacturer. Fine £50
pp. 62/3	20 Jan.	1866	Francis Frederick Fox, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 62/3	20 Jan.	1866	William Frayne, merchant. Fine £50
p. 127	20 Oct.	1866	Mervyn Kersteman King, s. of William Thomas Poole King. To pay 40/– because his father is a redemptioner
p. 149	5 Jan.	1867	Richard Plantagenet Campbell, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos. Honorary member[5]
p. 332	14 April	1869	Charles Phipps Lucas, s. and app. of John Lucas. Payment of 4/6d.
p. 336	23 April	1869	Herbert Poole King, s. of William Thomas Poole King. 40/– because his father was a redemptioner
pp. 371/2	29 Oct.	1869	Arthur Baker, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 372/3	29 Oct.	1869	Robert Hassell, merchant. Fine £50
H.B.25			
p. 2	6 Aug.	1870	Charles Bowles Hare. Fine £50
p. 94	13 Oct.	1871	Edmund Ambrose King, s. and app. of William Thomas Poole King. Payment of 4/6d.
pp. 171/2	27 July	1872	Charles Octavius Harvey, merchant. Fine £50
p. 182	26 Oct.	1872	John Noble Coleman Pope, s. of George Pope, born after his father's admission. Payment of 4/6d.
p. 208	25 Jan.	1873	Henry Grace Hare, merchant. Fine £50

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[5] He signed the book on 9 January 1867.

H.B.25			
p. 209	25 Jan.	1873	John Edmund Jose, s. and app. of Thomas Porter Jose
p. 240	17 May	1873	Alfred Terrett Taylor, s. and app. of Thomas Terrett Taylor, now Master
pp. 261/2	12 July	1873	Horace Thomas Barnes, s. of Thomas Barnes
p. 271	30 Aug.	1873	Henry Frederick Tobin Bush, merchant. Fine £50
p. 272	30 Aug.	1873	Renn Hampden Wilson, merchant. Fine £50
p. 309	30 Jan.	1874	Francis Reginald Barnes, s. of Thomas Barnes. To pay 4/6d.
p. 363	31 Oct.	1874	Alfred George de Lisle Bush, merchant. Fine £50
p. 364	31 Oct.	1874	George William Edwards. Fine £50
pp. 365/6	31 Oct.	1874	Herbert John Taylor, s. of Thomas Terrett Taylor. Apprentice of his father 11 April 1867 to 17 Nov. 1871 and by indenture of turnover to William Proctor Baker to 11 April 1874
H.B.26			
pp. 32/3	29 Jan.	1876	Reginald Wyndham Butterworth, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 33/4	29 Jan.	1876	John Henry Woodward, merchant. Fine £50
p. 87	4 Nov.	1876	Lucas Charles Fuidge Abbot, s. of Henry Abbot and app. of his uncle John Frederick Lucas
pp. 114/15	27 Jan.	1877	William Claxton, s. of late William Claxton
p. 136	28 July	1877	Percy Liston King, s. of William Thomas Poole King, born after his father's admission. To pay 40/-
p. 262	26 July	1879	Thomas Porter Hatt Jose, s. of Thomas Porter Jose, born after his father's admission. To pay 40/-
pp. 272/3	8 Nov.	1879	Thomas Poole King, s. of Richard Jenkins Poole King, deceased. Born after his father's admission. To pay 40/-
pp. 336/7	8 Jan.	1881	Steuart Fripp. Fine, £50
p. 345	12 Feb.	1881	Charles Hill. Fine, £50
p. 362	28 May	1881	Robert Henry Tilstone Barnes, s. of

			Robert Grey Barnes. Born after his father's admission. 4/6d.
p. 413	8 April	1882	Harry Willoughby Beloe, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 431/2	29 July	1882	Arthur Mansell Edwards. Fine £50
pp. 432/3	29 July	1882	Herbert George Edwards. Fine £50
p. 442	28 Oct.	1882	Edward Beadon Colthurst. Fine £50
pp. 442/3	28 Oct.	1882	Sydney William Edwards, s. and app. of George William Edwards
pp. 459/60	27 Jan.	1883	Frank Ambrose King, s. of William Thomas Poole King. Pays 40/–
H.B.27			
pp. 55/6	10 April	1884	Thomas Gadd Matthews. Fine £50
p. 138	31 Oct.	1885	Richard Anstice Fox. Fine £50
p. 139	31 Oct.	1885	William Pool Fox, s. and app. of Francis Frederick Fox.
p. 153	30 Jan.	1886	Gilbert Leigh Abbot, gentleman. Fine £50
p. 200	30 April	1887	Averay Neville Jones, s. of John Averay Jones
pp. 255/6	21 July	1888	George Leonard Matthews. Fine £50
pp. 256/7	21 July	1888	Edward Colston Lucas, s. of John Frederick Lucas
pp. 264/5	27 Oct.	1888	George Oswald Spafford. Fine £50
pp. 290/1	27 April	1889	Charles Gathorne Hill. Fine £50
pp. 290/1	27 April	1889	Edward Burrow Hill. Fine £50
pp. 300/1	27 July	1889	Edward Burnet James. Fine £50
pp. 327/8	1 Feb.	1890	Charles Henry Paul, son of Charles Paul, born after his father's admission. Pays 40/–
p. 348	26 July	1890	William Welsford Ward, gentleman. Fine £50
pp. 406/7	31 Oct.	1891	Charles Guy Tilstone Barnes, s. of Robert Grey Barnes
pp. 442/3	30 July	1892	John Henry Clarke, gentleman. Fine £50[6]
H.B.28			
p. 5	28 Jan.	1893	John Edward Colthurst, s. of Edward Beadon Colthurst. To pay 4/6d.
pp. 39/40	28 Oct.	1893	Thoomas Ruding Davey. Fine £50

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[6] On the printed notice of the meeting to be held on 30 July 1892, William Edward Parry Burgess was to be proposed as a member. He had been nominated on 30 April, but there is no record of his election on 30 July 1892.

H.B.28			
pp. 40/1	28 Oct.	1893	Edgar Arthur Vining Baker, s. and app. of Arthur Baker
pp. 41/2	28 Oct.	1893	Arthur Beadon Colthurst, s. of Edward Beadon Colthurst
p. 102	8 Jan	1895	Philip William Deane Cooper. Fine £50
p. 113	27 April	1895	William Edgar Paul, s. of Charles Paul, born after his father's admission. Pays 40/–
pp. 123/4	27 July	1895	Allan McArthur, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 131/2	26 Oct.	1895	John George Russell Harvey. Fine £50
pp. 185/6	24 Oct.	1896	William Ansell Todd, merchant. Fine £50
p. 207	30 Jan.	1897	George Pope Newstead, app. of his uncle George Henry Pope
pp. 281/2	24 Oct.	1898	Hamilton Wilfrid Killigrew Wait, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 282/3	24 Oct.	1898	Charles Adams, merchant. Fine £50
pp. 283/4	24 Oct.	1898	George William Davey, tobacco manufacturer. Fine £50
p. 306	28 Jan.	1899	Colonel Frederick Cusac Ord. Fine £50
p. 312	29 April	1899	Charles Mervyn King, s. of Mervyn Kersteman King
pp. 355/6	28 April	1900	Arthur Cecil Powell, nephew and app. of William Augustus Frederick Powell
p. 412	27 July	1901	Charles Cornelius Savile. Fine £50
p. 452	26 April	1902	Cecil Willoughby Beloe. Fine £50
H.B.29			
p. 31	31 Jan.	1903	Andrew Noble Pope, s. of John Noble Coleman Pope. Pays 4/6d.
p. 64	24 Oct.	1903	Walter Reginald Paul, s. of Charles Paul, deceased. Born after his father's admission. Pays 40/–
p. 89	15 April	1904	Field-Marshal the Earl Roberts. Honorary Member[7]
p. 89	15 April	1904	Henry Edelbert Wellington Fitzroy 9th Duke of Beaufort. Honorary Member[7]

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[7] It was decided to present the Freedom to Roberts and to the Duke of Beaufort on 24 Oct. 1903 (*H.B.29*, 24 Oct. 1903), but in fact it was not until April 1904 that the Master reported that he had entertained them to dinner and presented the Freedom on 15 April (*H.B.29*, p. 89, 24 April 1904).

p. 103	16 July	1904	James Colthurst Godwin. Fine £50[8]
p. 192	28 April	1906	Gerald Harry Beloe. Fine £50
p. 193	28 April	1906	Charles Cyril Clarke. Fine £50
p. 268	27 July	1907	Hampden Vincent Barnard. Fine £50
p. 325	31 Oct.	1908	Robert Hilton Todd. Fine £50
p. 342	30 Jan.	1909	Chester William Todd. Fine £50
p. 355	24 April	1909	James Herbert Budgett. Fine £50
p. 420	30 July	1910	William Danger Fripp. Fine £50
p. 452	29 April	1911	John Stanley Davey. Fine £50
H.B.30			
p. 16	28 Oct.	1911	Edward Hamilton Everard Woodward s. of John Henry Woodward, born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
p. 32	27 Jan.	1912	Charles Francis Aubone Hare, merchant. Fine £50
p. 33	27 Jan.	1912	Claude Basil Fry, merchant. Fine £50
p. 68	27 July	1912	Charles Samuel Clarke. Fine £50
p. 97	25 Jan.	1913	William Alfred Drew Alexander. Fine £50
p. 113	26 April	1913	Hugh Godfrey de Lisle Bush, s. of Alfred George de Lisle Bush. Born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
p. 209	30 Jan.	1915	Claude D'Arcy Stratton Bush, s. of Alfred George de Lisle Bush. Born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
p. 308	28 April	1917	Major Valentine Albany Hillman. Fine £50
p. 322	28 July	1917	Henley Sommerville Evans. Fine £50
p. 357	26 Jan.	1918	Edward Herbert Stock, merchant. Fine £50
p. 358	26 Jan.	1918	Ellison Fuller Eberle, coachbuilder. Fine £50
p. 358	26 Jan.	1918	Victor Fuller Eberle, oil merchant. Fine £50
p. 375	27 April	1918	Herbert Midelton Baker, merchant. Fine £50
p. 375	27 April	1918	Arnold Evans, merchant. Fine £50
p. 420	1 Feb.	1919	Capt. Cecil Horace Reginald Barnes, s. of Horace Thomas Barnes. Born

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[8] He is recorded as having been proposed and admitted on this date, but his admission is also recorded on 29 Oct. 1904 (*H.B.29*, p. 111).

H.B.30		
		after his father's admission. To pay 4/6d.
p. 430	29 Mar. 1919	Freedom presented to the Rt. Hon. Charles Edward Hungerford Atholl Colston, 1st Baron Roundaway
p. 430	29 Mar. 1919	Freedom presented to the Rt. Hon. Lewis Fry, P.C.
	29 Mar. 1919	Freedom presented to Sir Herbert Warren, K.C.V.O.
	29 Mar. 1919	Freedom presented to George Alfred Wills
p. 436	26 April 1919	Basil John Humphries, merchant. Fine £50
	26 April 1919	Lionel Goodenough Taylor, journalist. Fine £50
H.B.31		
p. 2	2 May 1919	Lieut.-Col. Dan. Burges, V.C. Admitted as Redemptioner without payment of a fine.
pp. 2, 3	2 May 1919	Hugh Lionel Evans Hosegood. Fine £50
p. 26	23 Oct. 1919	Freedom presented to Admiral of the Fleet Sir David Beatty
p. 48	31 Jan. 1920	Alexander Black Mitchell. Fine £50
p. 48	31 Jan. 1920	George Dall Edwards, s. of Herbert George Edwards. Born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
p. 49	31 Jan. 1920	Reginald Herbert Edwards, s. of Herbert George Edwards. Born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
p. 56	15 April 1920	Freedom presented to Douglas, Field-Marshal The Rt. Hon. Earl Haig
p. 73	24 July 1920	Walter Burnet James. Fine £50
p. 73	24 July 1920	George Palliser Martin. Fine £50
p. 78	30 Oct. 1920	Gilbert Sydney James, s. of Sir Edward Burnet James. Born after his father's admission. To pay 40–/.
p. 105	30 April 1921	Foster Gotch Robinson. Fine, £50
p. 113	10 June 1921	Freedom presented to H.R.H. Edward, Prince of Wales[9]

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[9] He succeeded to the throne as King Edward VIII 20 Jan. 1936, and the Minute of the Standing Committee of 26 June 1936 records a communication from Sir Clive Wigram to the effect that His Majesty could not continue to be an Honorary Member and could only extend his patronage to the Society.

p. 127	29 Oct.	1921	Freedom presented to Henry Herbert Wills.
p. 240	26 April	1924	Hiatt Cowles Baker, Fine £50.
p. 256	25 Oct.	1924	Richard Edmund Davey, app. of his father, Thomas Ruding Davey. To pay 4/6d.
p. 256	25 Oct.	1924	John St. Clair Harvey, app. of his father, John George Russell Harvey. To pay 4/6d.
p. 257	25 Oct.	1924	Robert Russell Stobart Harvey, app. of his father John George Russell Harvey. To pay 4/6d.
p. 275	31 Jan.	1925	Edward Napier Deane Harvey, app. of his uncle, John George Russell Harvey. To pay 4/6d.
p. 288	25 April	1925	Freedom presented to Henry Hugh Arthur Fitzroy, 10th Duke of Beaufort
p. 351	24 July	1926	George Vernon Proctor Wills, merchant. Fine £50
p. 359	30 Oct.	1926	Alfred Esmond Robinson, M.C., merchant. Fine £50
p. 405	29 Oct.	1927	Cyril Tom Culverwell, merchant. Fine £50
p. 427	28 Jan.	1928	Edmund Poole King, s. of Edmund Ambrose King. Born after his father's admission. To pay 4/6d.

H.B.32

p. 18	27 Oct.	1928	Alan John Dennis McArthur, s. of Allan McArthur. Born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
p. 51	27 April	1929	Freedom voted to W. Melville Wills (presented on 31 May 1929. *H.B.32*, p. 56)
p. 101	2 May	1930	Roger Simon Woodchurch Clarke, merchant. Fine £50
p. 119	31 Oct.	1930	Freedom voted to Gilbert Alan Hamilton Wills 1st Baron Dulverton (presented 30 Jan. 1931). Lord Dulverton subsequently became a member by redemption on payment of £50 (*H.B.33*, p. 88).
p. 119	30 Oct.	1930	Douglas Ryan Midelton Baker. Fine £50

H.B.32

p. 134	30 Jan.	1931	Henry Sommerville Gunn, merchant. Fine £50
p. 148	1 May	1931	Lt.-Col. Percy Gotch Robinson, D.S.O. Fine £50
p. 149	1 May	1931	Major Egbert Cadbury, D.S.C., D.F.C. Fine £50
p. 177	30 Oct.	1931	Norris Hampden King, s. of Edmund Ambrose King. Born after his father's admission. To pay 4/6d.
p. 190	29 Jan.	1932	Tracy Percival Rogers. Fine £50
p. 213	29 April	1932	Hugh Charles Adams, son of Charles Adams. To pay 4/6d.
p. 269	28 April	1933	Frank Oliver Wills. Fine £50
p. 321	27 April	1934	Gerald Percival Vivian Rogers. Fine £50
p. 332	27 July	1934	Lt.-Commander Vivian John Robinson Fine £50
p. 368	3 May	1935	Thomas Hosegood Davies. Fine £50
p. 380	26 July	1935	Christopher Henry Jose, s. of John Edmund Jose. Born after his father's admission. To pay 4/6d.
p. 403	31 Jan.	1936	Frederick Charles Burgess. Fine £50
p. 404	31 Jan.	1936	Robert John Sinclair. Fine £50
p. 404	31 Jan.	1936	Charles Theodore Budgett. Fine £50
p. 404	31 Jan.	1936	Charles Loraine Hill, s. of Charles Gathorne Hill. To pay 40/–

H.B.33

p. 77	28 Jan.	1938	John Esmond Cyril Clarke, s. and app. of father, Charles Cyril Clarke. To pay 4/6d.
p. 88	29 April	1938	The Rt. Hon. Gilbert Alan Hamilton Wills, Baron Dulverton of Batsford. Fine £50. (He had previously been given the Freedom. *H.B.32*, p. 119, 31 Oct. 1930)
p. 97	22 July	1938	Geoffrey Goodenough Taylor, s. and app. of father, Sir Lionel Goodenough Taylor. To pay 4/6d.
p. 147	21 July	1939	Commander Athelstan Paul Bush. Fine £50
p. 190	26 April	1939	Major Gilbert Leonard Stratton. Fine £50
p. 273	24 April	1942	David Neilson Robertson. Fine £50

p. 281	31 July	1942	John Herbert Micklethwait Budgett. Fine £50
p. 302	29 Jan.	1943	Christian Ernest Pitman. Fine £50
p. 313	30 April	1943	Lt.-Commander Alan Oliver Wills. Fine £50
p. 352	28 April	1944	Stephen Guy Burnet James. Fine £50
p. 391	29 Jan.	1945	Capt. William Gerald Beloe, s. of Gerald Harry Beloe, born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
H.B.34			
p. 6	26 Oct.	1945	The Hon. William Ralph Seymour Bathurst. Fine £50
p. 44	26 April	1946	John Kenric La Touche Mardon. Fine £50
p. 45	26 April	1946	John Hyde Haslewood Perks. Fine £50
p. 53	21 June	1946	Freedom given to the Rt. Hon. Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill
p. 74	25 Oct.	1946	The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Noel, 12th Earl Waldegrave. Fine £50[10]
p. 93	31 Jan.	1946	Robert Edward Todd, s. of Robert Hilton Todd, born after his father's admission. To pay 40/–
p. 251	28 Jan.	1949	Harold Maurice Corner Hosegood. Fine £50
p. 411	21 July	1950	Hugh Charles Innes Rogers. Fine £50
H.B.35			
p. 18	27 Oct.	1950	John Foster Robinson. Fine £50
p. 104	27 July	1951	Charles Nigel Clarke, s. of Charles Cyril Clarke. To pay 40/–
p. 195	15 April	1952	Peter Gordon Cardew. Fine £50
p. 196	25 April	1952	John Rodney Rupert Scull. Fine £50
p. 286	30 Jan.	1953	William Reginald Verdon-Smith. Fine £50
p. 356	30 Oct.	1953	John Charles Gathorne Hill. Fine £50
p. 365	6 Nov.	1953	Freedom given to H.R.H. Philip Duke of Edinburgh, K.G.
p. 391	29 Jan.	1954	Richard Howard Brown. Fine £50
p. 392	29 Jan.	1954	John Henshaw Britton. Fine £50
H.B.36			
p. 8	23 July	1954	John Clive Gascoigne, M.C. Fine £50

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[10] In 1971, the Hall congratulated Earl Waldegrave on receiving the Order of the Garter. The *Hall Book* stated that only 9 Merchant Venturers had received it, and that this seemed to be the first occasion on which it had been given to a full member (*H.B.40*, 30 April 1971).

H.B.36

p. 9	23 July	1954	John Alan Corner Hosegood. Fine £50
p. 106	22 July	1955	John Godfrey Midelton Baker. Fine £50
p. 221	26 Oct.	1956	John Esmond Robinson, s. of Alfred Esmond Robinson. Born after father's admission. To pay 40/–

H.B.37

p. 4	3 May	1957	Richard Hill. Fine £50
p. 137	30 Jan.	1959	George Edward McWatters. Fine £50
p. 183	24 July	1959	Christopher John King. Fine £50
p. 182 [*sic*]	24 July	1959	The Rt. Hon. Frederick Anthony Hamilton Wills, (2nd) Baron Dulverton of Batsford. Fine £50
p. 254	29 April	1960	John Adam Gordon. Fine £50
p. 273 [*sic*]	22 July	1960	Ernest John Partridge. Fine £50
p. 272 [*sic*]	22 July	1960	Douglas Arthur Brearley. Fine £50

H.B.38

p. 85	27 Oct.	1961	Mark Whitwill, junior. Fine £50
p. 129	26 April	1962	Humphrey Ashley Densham. Fine £50
p. 129	26 April	1962	Robin Paul Bush, s. of Athelstan Paul Bush, by apprenticeship. To pay 4/6d.
p. 143	27 July	1962	George Anthony Burnet James. Fine £50
p. 264	31 Jan.	1964	John Leonard Eberle. Fine £50
p. 265	31 Jan.	1964	Alderman Sir Kenneth Alfred Leader Brown. Fine £50
p. 300	31 July	1964	Thomas Lloyd Robinson. Fine £50

H.B.39

p. 121	28 Jan.	1966	Sir John Vernon Wills, s. of Sir George Vernon Proctor Wills Bt., a member. To pay 40/–
p. 121	28 Jan.	1966	Malcolm Allinson Anson. Fine £50
p. 179	27 Jan.	1967	John Oliver Stanley Clarke. Fine £50
p. 180	27 Jan.	1967	Antony Stewart Hooper. Fine £50
p. 212	28 July	1967	John Andrew Southerden Burn. Fine £50

H.B.40

p. 122	25 April	1969	Douglas Andrew Breach. Fine £50
p. 122	25 April	1969	John Douglas Pye Smith Stirling. Fine £50
p. 123	25 April	1969	Jack Eugene David Wilcox. Fine £50

p. 207	31 July	1970	David Cuthbert Tudway Quilter. Fine £50
p. 207	31 July	1970	Christopher Wilson Thomas. Fine £50
p. 262	30 July	1971	Julian John St. Clair Mardon. Fine £50
H.B.41			
p. 18	28 April	1972	Rear Admiral James Henry Fuller Eberle, son of Victor Fuller Eberle, born after his father's admission, on payment of £2
p. 37	28 July	1972	Arthur Michael McWatters. Fine £50
p. 89	27 July	1973	Anthony Leonard à Court Robinson. Fine £50
p. 104	16 Oct.	1973	Freedom conferred on H.R.H. Charles, Prince of Wales
p. 149	19 July	1974	Mark Christian Pitman. Fine £50

APPENDIX B

Table of admissions 1800–1899

	Patrimony	Apprenticeship	Fine	Honorary	Total
1800–1809	8	2	20	6	36
1810–1819	13	9	3	3	28
1820–1829	5	11	1	2	19
1830–1839	2	3	19	1	25
1840–1849	6	2	—	3	11
1850–1859	3	9	20	4	36
1860–1869	9*	5	12	1	27
1870–1879	7	5	9	—	21
1880–1889	4	2	14	—	20
1890–1899	6	2	11	—	19
	63	50	109	20	242

* Does not include P. W. S. Miles admitted by patrimony in 1864. He was already an honorary member.

APPENDIX C

Table of admissions 1900–1974

	Patrimony	Apprenticeship	Fine	Honorary	Total
1900–1909	2	1	9	2	14
1910–1919	4	—	17	5	26
1920–1929	5	4	8	5	22
1930–1939	6	—	15	1	22
1940–1949	2	—	10	1	13
1950–1959	2	—	15	1	18
1960–1969	1	1	15	—	17
1970–1974	1	—	6	1	8
	23	6	95	16	140

APPENDIX D

Masters and Wardens since 1900

For the list before 1900, see J. Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 326 ff. In his list Latimer included the names of the Master and Wardens of the merchant organisation of 1500, although this cannot be shown to be directly connected with the Society of Merchant Venturers. Elections were held in November.

	Master	Wardens
1900	George Oswald Spafford	Edgar A. V. Baker, Thomas R. Davey
1901	Edgar A. V. Baker	Thomas R. Davey, Allan McArthur
1902	Thomas Ruding Davey	Allan McArthur, George Henry Pope
1903	Allan McArthur	George Henry Pope, J. G. Russell Harvey
1904	George Henry Pope	J. G. Russell Harvey, Hamilton Wilfrid Killigrew Wait
1905	J. G. Russell Harvey	H. Wilfrid K. Wait, Charles Adams
1906	H. Wilfrid K. Wait	Charles Adams, George William Davey
1907	Charles Adams	George William Davey, Colonel Frederick Cusac Ord
1908	George W. Davey	Col. Frederick C. Ord, Arthur C. Powell
1909	Col. Frederick Cusac Ord	Arthur Cecil Powell, Charles Cornelius Savile
1910	Arthur Cecil Powell	Charles Cornelius Savile, Arthur Beadon Colthurst
1911	Charles Cornelius Savile	Arthur Beadon Colthurst, Cecil Willoughby Beloe
1912	Arthur Beadon Colthurst	Cecil Willoughby Beloe, Edmund Ambrose King
1913	Cecil Willoughby Beloe	Edmund Ambrose King, Hampden Vincent Barnard
1914	Edmund Ambrose King	Hampden Vincent Barnard, Robert Hilton Todd

	Master	Wardens
1915	Hampden Vincent Barnard	Robert Hilton Todd, James Herbert Budgett
1916	Robert Hilton Todd	James Herbert Budgett, Charles Cyril Clarke
1917	James Herbert Budgett	William Danger Fripp, Claude Basil Fry
1918	William Danger Fripp	Claude Basil Fry, Charles Samuel Clarke
1919	Claude Basil Fry	Charles Cyril Clarke, William Danger Fripp
1920	Charles Cyril Clarke	Charles Samuel Clarke, Gerald Harry Beloe
1921	Charles Samuel Clarke	Gerald Harry Beloe, Henley Somerville Evans
1922	Gerald Harry Beloe	Henley Somerville Evans, Herbert Midelton Baker
1923	Henley Somerville Evans	Herbert Midelton Baker, Victor Fuller Eberle
1924	Herbert Midelton Baker	Victor Fuller Eberle, Lionel Goodenough Taylor
1925	Victor Fuller Eberle	Lionel Goodenough Taylor, Hugh Lionel Evans Hosegood
1926	Lionel Goodenough Taylor	Hugh Lionel Evans Hosegood, Arnold Evans
1927	Hugh Lionel Evans Hosegood	Arnold Evans, George Palliser Martin
1928	Arnold Evans	George Palliser Martin, Major Andrew Noble Pope[1]
1929	Andrew Noble Pope	Hiatt Cowles Baker, Ellison Fuller Eberle
1930	Hiatt Cowles Baker	Ellison Fuller Eberle, Sir George Vernon Proctor Wills, Bart.[2]
1931	Ellison Fuller Eberle	Alfred Esmond Robinson, John St. Clair Harvey
1932	Alfred Esmond Robinson	John St. Clair Harvey, Lt.-Col. Percy Gotch Robinson

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[1] George Palliser Martin died in office. Andrew Noble Pope then became Senior Warden and Hiatt C. Baker was elected Junior Warden (*H.B.32*, p. 40, 22 Feb. 1929).

[2] He died in office and Alfred Esmond Robinson was elected in his place (*H.B. 32*, p. 143, 27 March 1931).

	Master	Wardens
1933	Alfred Esmond Robinson[3]	Lt.-Col. Percy Gotch Robinson, Tracy Percival Rogers
1934	Lt.-Col. Percy Gotch Robinson	T. Percival Rogers, Col. Dan Burgess
1935	Tracy Percival Rogers	Col. Dan Burgess, Henry Sommerville Gunn
1936	Col. Dan Burgess, V.C., D.S.O.	Henry Sommerville Gunn, Major Richard Edmund Davey
1937	Henry Sommerville Gunn	Major Richard Edmund Davey, Gilbert Sydney James
1938	Major Richard Edmund Davey	Gilbert Sydney James, Frank Oliver Wills
1939	Ellison Fuller Eberle	Frank Oliver Wills, Frederick Charles Burgess
1940	Ellison Fuller Eberle	Frank Oliver Wills, Frederick Charles Burgess
1941	Ellison Fuller Eberle	Frank Oliver Wills, Frederick Charles Burgess
1942	Frank Oliver Wills	Frederick Charles Burgess,[4] Foster Gotch Robinson
1943	Foster Gotch Robinson	Gilbert Sydney James, Major Egbert Cadbury
1944	Foster Gotch Robinson	Gilbert Sydney James, Major Egbert Cadbury
1945	Gilbert Sydney James	Major Egbert Cadbury, Roger S. W. Clarke
1946	Roger Simon Woodchurch Clarke	Major Egbert Cadbury, Robert Russell Stobart Harvey
1947	Major Egbert Cadbury	Robert Russell Stobart Harvey, Douglas Ryan Midelton Baker
1948	Robert Russell Stobart Harvey	Douglas Ryan Midelton Baker, Alan John Dennis McArthur
1949	Douglas R. M. Baker	A. Dennis McArthur, Edmund Poole King

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[3] For reasons why Alfred Esmond Robinson was elected for a second term, see *H.B.32*, p. 287, 29 Sept. 1933.

[4] Died in office. Foster Gotch Robinson then became Senior Warden and Gilbert Sydney James was chosen Junior Warden (*H.B.33*, p. 330, 29 Oct. 1943).

	Master	Wardens
1950	A. J. Dennis McArthur	E. P. King, Sir Robert Sinclair
1951	Edmund Poole King	Sir Robert Sinclair, Charles L. Hill
1952	Sir Robert John Sinclair	Charles Loraine Hill, Christian Ernest Pitman
1953	Charles Loraine Hill	Christian Ernest Pitman, John Herbert Micklethwaite Budgett
1954	Christian Ernest Pitman	John Herbert Micklethwaite Budgett, John Esmond Cyril Clarke
1955	John Herbert Micklethwaite Budgett	John Esmond Cyril Clarke, Alan Oliver Wills
1956	John Esmond Cyril Clarke	Alan Oliver Wills, the Hon. William Ralph Seymour Bathurst
1957	Alan Oliver Wills	The Hon. W. R. S. Bathurst, John Kenric La Touche Mardon
1958	William Ralph Seymour Bathurst	John Kenric La Touche Mardon, William Gerald Beloe
1959	John Kenric La Touche Mardon	William Gerald Beloe, Hugh Charles Innes Rogers
1960	William Gerald Beloe	Hugh Charles Innes Rogers, John Henshaw Britton
1961	Hugh Charles Innes Rogers	John Henshaw Britton, Stephen Guy Burnet James
1962	Athelstan Paul Bush	John Henshaw Britton, Stephen Guy Burnet James
1963	John Henshaw Britton	Stephen Guy Burnet James, Richard Howard Brown
1964	Stephen Guy Burnet James	Richard Howard Brown, Peter Gordon Cardew
1965	Richard Howard Brown	Peter Gordon Cardew, Charles Nigel Clarke
1966	Peter Gordon Cardew	Charles Nigel Clarke, Sir William Reginald Verdon-Smith
1967	Charles Nigel Clarke	Sir William Reginald Verdon-Smith, John Charles Gathorne Hill

	Master	Wardens
1968	Sir William Reginald Verdon-Smith	John Charles Gathorne Hill, Sir Kenneth Alfred Leader Brown
1969	John Charles Gathorne Hill	Sir Kenneth Alfred Leader Brown, John Godfrey Midelton Baker
1970	Alderman Sir Kenneth Brown	John Godfrey Midelton Baker, John Adams Gordon
1971	John Godfrey Midelton Baker	John Adams Gordon, Mark Whitwill
1972	John Adams Gordon	Mark Whitwill, Humphrey Ashley Densham
1973	Mark Whitwill	Humphrey Ashley Densham, Richard Hill
1974	Humphrey Ashley Densham	Richard Hill, John Leonard Eberle

APPENDIX E

Treasurers since 1900

For the list of Treasurers before 1900, see Latimer, *Merchant Venturers*, pp. 334 ff.

1876–1901	George Henry Pope
1901–1914	Percy Liston King
1914–1918	Col. John Henry Woodward
1918–1932	William Welsford Ward
1932–1944	Gerald Harry Beloe
1944–1962	Commander Athelstan Paul Bush
1962–1969	Edmund Poole King
1969–	John Esmond Cyril Clarke

APPENDIX F

Payments and Receipts

Totals for the five years 1845–1850

(From Claxton's Report on the finances, pp. 31 ff.) See pp. 279 ff *supra.*

		PAYMENTS						RECEIPTS					
		Extraordinary			*Ordinary*			*Extraordinary*			*Ordinary*		
		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1	Fines for the manor of Clifton	—			—			6,721	0	0	—		
2	Merchants' Almshouse	—			1,760	2	7	—			796	0	0
3	The Dock Estate	61	12	6	1,048	4	9	39	12	10	5,304	0	0
4	Wharfage, Anchorage and Moorage	—			5,401	0	0	—			16,117	5	7
5	The Merchants' Hall	209	3	7	1,044	11	3	—			—		
6	Leasehold estates in Bristol	—			67	6	0	285	0	0	528	0	0
7	Freehold estates in the City of Bristol, formerly chief and fee farm rents	—			48	1	2	—			110	12	6
8	The manor of Clifton	729	2	5	778	11	4	—			—		
9	Lands in the Manor of Clifton sold on fee	51	5	10	—			985	0	0	—		
10	Interest payable on Trust Accounts	—			684	15	0	—			—		
11	Salaries	—			1,575	0	0	—			—		
12	Incidental expenses	111	1	5	1,192	19	9	—			—		
13	The Quarries	—			270	8	6	—			1,145	0	0
14	Interest on bonds	—			8,752	6	10	—			1,543	12	5
15	Gifts	591	7	0	416	11	3	—			—		
16	The Merchants' Hall School	—			365	19	0	—			—		
17	Law charges	238	1	11	834	13	6	—			—		
18	The late Poor Jouse at Locking	—			1	2	6	—			36	10	0
19	Lands at Locking, late Laneys	290	11	0	17	0	0	—			284	17	0
20	Pensions	—			175	0	0	—			—		
21	Premises granted on leases for lives determinable with lives	15	2	7	7	3	3	—			93	10	6

		PAYMENTS						RECEIPTS					
		Extraordinary			*Ordinary*			*Extraordinary*			*Ordinary*		
		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
22	Premises granted on leases for 40 years renewable every 14 years	—			84	6	10	—			1,049	0	0
23	Premises granted for 1,000 years	—			37	2	6	—			465	3	0
24	Fee farm and ground rents in the parish of Clifton	—			11	11	0	—			144	7	6
25	Premises let on rack rent	—			325	6	4	—			1,407	9	9
26	Payments for encroachment on the waste	—			5	1	9	—			66	13	3
27	The Hotwells now in premises let at rack rent	40	0	0	29	16	0	—			110	0	0
28	Rack rents in the parish of Clifton transferred to premises let at rack rents (No. 25)	123	18	4	208	19	9	—			939	8	2
29	Chief and fee farm rents in the parish of Clifton transferred to various accounts	—			81	12	11	—			1,067	9	3
30	Victoria Square, formerly Ferney Close	8,848	18	10	—			—			—		
	TOTALS:	11,310	5	5	25,340	5	3	8,030	13	10	31,209	6	11
		£36,650	10	8				£39,240	0	9			

Index of Persons, Places and Selected Subjects

The Index gives the names of all persons and places (except Bristol) referred to in the text and footnotes. Organisations, institutions and societies have also been included as well as a number of references to selected subjects.

A number of references have been grouped under the following sub-headings within the main Index: Bristol, Clifton, The Society of Merchant Venturers, Ships' Names.

The arrangement of the material in the book is chronological and topical, and it is hoped that the List of Contents and the sub-headings within the chapters, together with the Index, will make it reasonably easy to find any aspect of the Society's work.

The following abbreviations have been used in the Index: SMV for The Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol; 16C., 17C., for sixteenth century, seventeenth century, etc.; n. for footnote.

Abbot, Gilbert Leigh, 253 n. 25, 557; Henry, 556; Lucas Charles Fuidge, 556; Napier, solicitor, 514

Abbott, T., porter to SMV, 453

Aberavon, 317

Abercarne, colliery explosion at, 390

Acraman, Alfred John, 551; Daniel Wade, 551; John, 553; William Edward, 393, 550, 553

Adams, Charles, 558, 562, 568; Francis, 193; Henry, feoffee of MV 1600, 19 n. 27; Hugh Charles, 562; Mr Shute, 194; Mary Shute, 189, 194

Adams' Chronicle of Bristol, 65 n. 61

Adams family, dispute with SMV, 194–5, 329

Addington, Henry, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister, 547

Addison, Robert, 206

Adelaide, Queen, wife of William IV, 410

Adlam, William, 553

Ady, William, accountant to SMV, 266, 277

Africa, pirate states of, 47 and n. 45, 170; regulation of trade with, 131–5, 237–9; shipping to and from, 94, 125 n. 2, 141; other references: 12, 104 n. 16, 144, 146, 147, 176, 201, 239. See also African Company, Royal Africa Company, Slave Trade, Senegal.

African Company (1750), 133–5, 237, 240

Aid to Russia Week, 540

Aitken, James, 223 and n. 29

Albert, Prince, given the freedom, 551; portrait of in Hall, 276, 458 n. 106, 530

Albert Lodge, Victoria Square, 339 and n. 71

Albert Victor, Prince, 413

Alder, Thomas, warden 1566, 13

Aldworth, John, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27; Robert, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27, 34; Thomas, 17 nn. 22, 23; 19 n. 27, 21, 85

Aldworth's Dock, 73

Alexander, Lydia, see Hackshaw; William Alfred Drew, 559

Alexandra, Queen, 529

Algiers, 65, 79, 83

Alice, Princess, Grand Duchess of Hesse Darmstadt, 412

Allen, E. A., 486; E. W., 519; Mr. (of the Post Office), 226; Mr. (of Clifton), 417 n. 65

Alleyn, Lavers, legacy to Merchants' Almshouse, 521

All Saints Church, Bristol, 27, 207, 458, 536
All Saints Church, Clifton, 347
All Saints Road, Clifton, 342
Alma Road, 343
Almain, Moses, 349
Almonds, bulk purchase by SMV, 87
Almsfolk Charity, 403–4
Almshouses, see under Society of Merchant Venturers: Almshouse, and General Index: Colston's, Burton's, Hill's
America, SMV and problems of colonies in, 142–4, 178–9; trade with, 37, 104 n. 16, 140, 142 n. 99, 143 n. 105, 144, 238, 239, 286; shipping to and from, 38, 94, 125 and n. 2, 141; other references, 80, 124, 135, 148, 177, 227, 293, 389
Ames, banker, 107 n. 35
Ames, Cave and Co., 118, 277
Ames, Hellicar and Sons, 160
Ames, Mrs. Jeremiah, 427 and n. 94
Amissa, 134
Amsterdam, 38
Anchorage, duty of, 19, 70, 73
Anchor Society, 112, 274
Anderson, Charles, 311, 547
Andrew, John, 115
Angell, John, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27
Anglesey, 93
Anglo-French Ambulance Corps, 540
Anne, Queen, portrait in the Hall, 275
Annuities, sold by SMV, 120–2
Anson, Malcolm Allison, 564
Anthonie, Thomas, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27
Antigua, 146, 527, 537
Antwerp, 11, 12, 37
Appledore, 313 n. 46
Apsley Road, 332, 333, 343
Arbuthnot, John, 134 n. 50
Arc de Triomphe, 271
Archer, M.P. for Warwick, 230
Arkwright, Richard, 234
Armstrong, John, 415
Armstrong College, Newcastle, 480 n. 21
Arno's Court, 91
Arrowsmith, J. W., 383 n. 132
Arundel, Edmund, 65
Ash, Richard, 416 n. 62
Ashley Down, 484
Ashley Hill, 31
Ashton Court, 416
Asia, trade to, 146, 147
Assembly Rooms, Bristol, old, 92, 186 (Lady Huntingdon's Chapel); new, 100
Association of Helpers of the Poor, 391
Atwood, Edward, 206 n. 54
Auckland House, Clifton Down, part of the new Hall, acquired 1949, 462 and n. 134, 463. See SMV, Merchants' Hall
Australia, 256, 257
Averay Road, Stapleton, 470 and n. 36
Avon, river, proposed bridge over, 115, 245, 303, see also Suspension Bridge, Vick's Legacy; other references, 26, 29, 31, 70 n. 82, 77, 150, 151, 153, 154, 158, 159, 182, 229, 305, 308, 314, 316
Avon Gorge, 474
Avonmouth, 305, 308, 309, 426, 529, 536
Awdry, S. J. D., Clerk to SMV, 456
Aylmer, Captain, 175
Azores, 38

Babb, Hugh, schoolmaster in Marine School, 358 n. 5
Backwell, 461 n. 121
Badminton, 412
Badminton School, 511
Baker, Arthur, 558; Douglas Ryan Midleton, 561, 570; Edgar Arthur Vining, 558, 568; Herbert Midleton, 559, 569; Hiatt Cowles, 561, 569 and n. 1; John Godfrey Midelton, 564, 572; Professor J. H., 458; Joseph, 416 n. 62; William, 429 and n. 116; William Proctor, Master 1869, Chairman of Docks Committee, 276, 376 n. 101, 377, 381 n. 124, 488 n. 67, 495 n. 89, 554, 556
Baker and Studley, developers, 330
Ballast Master, 77, 162
Ballast wharf, 77
Banking, 225, 409
Barbados, 68, 81, 140, 172, 208
Barbary, 78, 126, 221

Barclay's Bank, Corn Street, 460; Henleaze Road, 460
Barge, William, 263, 264, 266
Barham, Admiral Lord, 405, 548
Barker, John, 19 n. 27, 20, 21, 39, 55; Captain, 173
Barnard, Hampden Vincent, 450, 454, 559, 568, 569
Barnes, Capt. Cecil Horace Reginald, 559–60; Charles Guy Tilstone, 557; Francis Kentucky, 552, 553; Francis Reginald, 556; George Mountford, 553: Horace Thomas, 556, 559–60; Robert Grey, 394, 553, 556, 557; Robert Henry Tilstone, 557–8; Thomas, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27; Thomas, 553, 556
Barnstaple, 73, 79, 313 and n. 46, 327
Barratt, John, 192
Barrow, Charles Withington, 550; the Rev. George, 363: James Syms, 550–1; John, 393, 547, 550: Robert Gay, 259, 417 n. 65, 550; Robert Withington, 553
Barry Island, 169
Bartlett, Captain Robert, 400
Barton Hill, 475
Barwick, E. W. F., 460
Baskerville, D., 331
Batavia, 256
Bateman, John, schoolmaster, 84
Bath, 99, 137, 226, 227, 228, 229, 418, 439, 474
Bath and Wells, bishop of, 515; Diocesan Girls' School, 511
Bath and West of England Agricultural Show, 533
Bath and West of England College of Pharmacy and Chemistry, 480
Bathurst, the Hon. William Ralph Seymour, 464, 490–1, 523, 563, 571
Bathurst Basin, 323
Beads, 146
Beans, 177
Bearer Bonds, issued by SMV, 115, 117, 118, 119–20, 277
Beatty, Admiral Sir David, 446, 539, 560
Beaufort, duchess of, 273, 436; duke of, 47, 289 n. 22; 7th duke of, 363, 411, 551; 8th duke of, 273, 553; 9th duke of, 446, 447, 558; 10th duke of, 447, 561; family, 412
Beaufort Road, Clifton, 332, 342, 466
Beche, Sir Henry de la, 413
Becher, Mr., sheriff, 175
Becket, Miss, 519
Beckford, Mr., 232 n. 85
Bedminster, 208, 510
Beer, restrictions on export, 65
Beere, Somerset, 208, 352, 353, 354, 355, 367, 485
Beere Farm, 353
Bell, J. T., accountant to SMV, 453
Bellamy, Mr., 427
Belle Vue, 185, 342; Lower, 342; Terrace, 342 n. 93
Beloe, Cecil Willoughby, 558, 568; Gerald Harry, Treasurer SMV, 452 and n. 55, 481 n. 27; 540, 559, 563, 569, 573; Harry Willoughby, 557; Capt. William Gerald, 563, 571
Bence, John Britten, 547
Benson, Carpenter, Cross & Co. 503 n. 115, 508 n. 136
Berkeley, George Cranfield, 173; Henry, M.P., 425
Berkeley, earl of, 178
Berkeley, see Gloucester–Berkeley Canal
Berkeley Place, 403
Berkeley Vale, 342 n. 93
Berkshire and Hampshire Junction Canal, 439
Bethune, relief fund, 527
Bevan, Edward, 550; John Scudamore, 554; Richard Robinson, 554
Bickley, Benjamin, 547, 548, 549; Francis, 549; John Latty, 548
Bideford, 314 n. 46
Bigg, Robert William, 554; William, junior, 554; William, senior, 554; William Oliver, 552, 554
Birmingham 90 and n. 1, 131 n. 4, 142 n. 98, 231, 379 n. 114, 418; University, 480 n. 21, 498, 499
Bishopric of Bristol Endowment Fund, 536
Bishopston, infants' school, 386; parish school, 386
Bitton, 208
Black Horse, public house, Jacob's Wells, 187 n. 39

Black Rock, 415; spring at, 417
Blackboy Hill, roundabout, 534–5
Blackburn, Committee of Trade in, 130
Blagden, Mrs., 116
Blandford, 207
Blandy, W. H., 520
Blome, Richard, author of *Britannia*, 31, 85
Board of Education, 375, 470, 480, 481, 485, 504 n. 121, 505, 511
Board of Greencloth, 63
Board of Health, 429, 430
Board of Trade, 317, 325, 326, 394, 396
Boar's Head, 187 n. 39
Bolton, duke of, 211
Bolton, James, 350
Bond, Sir Robert, P.M. of New Zealand, 530
Bonding Yard, 278, 346, 438, 469
Bonny river, 201
Book of Charters, SMV, xvii
Book of Petitions, SMV, xvii
Book of Trade, SMV, xvii
Boulton, John, 19 n. 27
Bowdler, Marmaduke, 206 n. 54
Bowyer, Colonel, and Stogursey, 366–8
Boy Scouts, 520, 528
Boydell, Benjamin, 18 n. 23; John, 18 n. 23
Brabant, 42
Bragge, Charles, secretary of Bristol Waterworks Company, 421 n. 80
Brandon Hill, 31, 197, 198, 199
Brandon Steep, 483
Brandy, 69
Brazil, 288, 292
Breach, Douglas Andrew, 564
Brearly, Douglas Arthur, 564
Brewer, William, 119
Brice, Edward, 548; Henry, 551; Henry Crane, 550; Richard Dawbney, 550; Samuel, 550; Thomas Durbin, 548; William, 551; William Diaper, 551; Mr., 250
Brick, Prudence, 400
Brickdale, Matthew, M.P., 138, 142 n. 95, 143, 147 and n. 125, 225
Bridge, James, 154
Bridge Approach Road, 432 n. 137
Bridge Trustees (Bristol Bridge), 98, 229; (Suspension Bridge), 434
Bridge Valley Road, 348 n. 140, 432
Bridgwater, 352, 353; infirmary, 526
Bright, Benjamin Hayward, 548; Henry, 257, 548; Lowbridge, 138 and n. 70; Richard, 407 n. 15, 409, 548; Robert, Chairman of Free Port Association and Shipowners' Association, 275, 304–5, 308, 309, 323, 553; Mr., 193, 260
Brightman, Charles, 433
Brislington Road, 228
BRISTOL
  Abbey Gate House, 436
  Artillery Company, 28
  Artillery House, 28
  Ashley Hostel for Boys, 528
  Back of, 71, 75, 87, 228
  Barber Surgeons' Hall, 92
  Belgian Refugee Fund, 539
  Benevolent Institute, 389 n. 6.
  Benevolent Society, 526
  Bishop of, 502, 515, 536
  Bishop's Appeal for Church Restoration and Expansion, 536
  Bishop's Palace, Redland, 490
  Blind Asylum, 391, 526
  Boy Scouts' Association, 520
  Brass Wire Company, 190
  Bridge, 27, 28, 29; new, 92, 228–9, 234; 241; Chapel of the Assumption on, 29
  Bridge Riots, 1793, 98
  Bridge Trustees, 229
  Bristol's Hope, see General Index under Newfoundland
  Captains' Society, 115, 117, 239 and n. 12
  Castle, 28–9, 47
  Cathedral, 27, 364, 435, 436, 536; Restoration Fund, 536
  Cathedral School, 100, 300, 511
  Certified Girls' Industrial School, 526
  Certified Industrial School, 386
  Chamber of Commerce, 248, 434, 440, 441, 526, 542, 543
  Channel, 150, 172, 175, 177, 247, 284, 291, 313, 317, 326–7
  Channel Mission Society, 438
  Charity Trustees, 366, 478
  Children's Hospital, 527
  Christchurch, rebuilding of, 207
  Christmas Steps, 100

Bristol—*cont.*
  Church Day Schools, 386
  Citizens' Recruiting Committee, 538
  City Docks Committee, 309
  City Engineer, 453, 461
  City Library, 192
  City Marine Ambulance Corps, 528
  City Valuer, 482
  Civic League, 528
  and Clifton Horticultural Society, 274
  and Clifton Railway Company, 274
  and Clifton Waterworks Company, 415
  Coffee House, 132, 239
  College Green, 26, 187 n. 39, 188, 232, 413, 417, 430, 538
  Commercial Rooms, 285, 295, 319
  Commissioners for Pitching and Paving, 351
  compared with London, 25–6, 28. See also General Index under London
  Coopers' Hall, 92, 424
  Corporation of the Poor, 98
  Corporation Superannuation Fund, 469
  Crippled Children's Society, 528, 530
  Council House, 7, 91, 240
  Customs House, 7, 91, 218, 240, 290 and n. 25; fire in, 395 n. 94
  Day and Night Nursery, 528
  Deaf and Dumb Institute, 390
  Dean and Chapter of, 100, 195
  Descriptions of, 24–8, 90–101, 243–8.
  Diocesan Board of Finance, 536
  Diocesan Clergy Fund, 539
  Diocesan Mission, 526
  Diocesan Trade and Mining School, see under Society of Merchant Venturers: Trade and Mining School
  Dispensary, 526
  District Nurses' Association, 528
  Docks Committee, 247, 305, 306, 309, 310, 312, 317, 319, 466
  Docks Company, 242, 243, 246, 248, 294, 304, 307–8, 309, 312, 328; members of SMV on Board of, 307–8; subscribers to, 307, 437
  Drapers, 5 nn. 15, 16; ordinances concerning, 5 n. 6
  Drawbridge, 232
  Dyers' Gild, 34
  Education, 30, 100–1, chapters 12, 20, 25. See also under individual schools and institutions
  Education Committee, 477 n. 6, 478, 489
  Enquiry Bureau, 538
  Exchange, 91, 224, 225 ff., 529
  Exchange Bank, 107 n. 35
  Exchange Coffee House, 221, 230
  and Exeter Railway, 439–40
  Eye Hospital, 392, 526
  Federation of Boys' Clubs, 528
  Female Penitentiary, 437, 526
  Folk House, 512
  Foreign trade of, 1–2, 8, 11 and n. 6, 19, 20, 38, 93–4, 124–5, 247. See also General Index under particular areas and companies.
  Gazette, 423, 424
  Gazette and Public Advertiser, 419 n. 73
  General Hospital, 389 n. 6, 392, 526, 527, 541 and n. 126
  and Gloucester Railway Company, 440
  Grammar School, 30, 100, 376, 386, 478, 483, 484, 511
  Guildhall, 152, 178, 438
  Haberdashers, 15, 35
  High Cross, 28
  Home for Crippled Children, 526
  Hospital for Sick Children, 526
  Housing Committee, and the Merchants' Almshouse, 523
  Housing Ltd., 541
  Humane Society, 390
  Industrial Dwellings, 468
  Industries, 33–5, 92. See also under particular occupations
  Infirmary, see Royal Infirmary
  Innholders' Gild, 29
  Italian Red Cross Fund, 539
  Ladies' Home, 389 n. 6
  Leather industry, 34
  Library, and SMV, 233
  Library Society, 233
  Linen-drapers, 35

Literary and Philosophical Institution, 274
Lord High Steward, 515
(Lord) Mayor's Relief Fund, 391; Fund for the unemployed, 527; Relief Fund, 527; Flood Distress Appeal, 527; Freedom from Hunger Appeal, 527; Fund to welcome Edward VII, 529; Hospital Extension Fund, 528; Edward VII Memorial Fund, 529; War Services Fund, 540; Appeal for China, 540
Lost Dogs' Home, 391
Marine School, see under Society of Merchant Venturers and in General Index
Mariners' Gild, 6 n. 20, 17, 81, 524
Marsh, Chapel in, 6
Martin's Coffee House, the Green, 281
Medical School, 389 n. 6
Mercers, 15, 35
Merchant Tailors, 35, 92
Merchants, early organisations, 1–9; ordinances concerning, 5–8
Merchants' Tolzey, 27, 28, 225
Metal industries, 34
Mercury, 377 n. 107, 423
and District Methodist Association, 528
Migration Committee, 541
Milk, 27
National Services Committee, 538
Observatory Co., 475–6. See also under Observatory in General Index
Old Vic Appeal, 528
Planning Office, 471
Planning and Public Works Committee, 535
Play Centre, 528
Population of, medieval, 2; 17C., 25; 18C., 90; 19C., 243
Port and Channel Dock Company, 309
Port Railway and Pier Company, 308
Porters' Company, 76
Post Office, 92
Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, 30, 100, 371, 373
Ragged Schools, 386
Red Cross Society, 538
Rest Home for Soldiers, Victoria Street, 538
Retailers, and foreign trade, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20 n. 34, 35, 36
Riots, in 18C., 98; in 1831, 274, 409–10
Royal Infirmary, 202, 207, 208, 389 n. 6, 392, 437, 438, 526, 527
Royal Light Horse Volunteers, 405
Royal Volunteer Infantry, 405
Sailors' Home, 520, 526, 528, 539
School Board, 381, 450, 477
School of Art, 381, 386
Sea Fencibles, 405
Seamen's Institute, 526
Soapmakers, 15
Social Centre, 528
South Wales and Southampton Union Railway, 440
Stamp Office, 107 n. 35
Steadfast Society, 95, 107 n. 37, 234, 235
and Taunton Canal, 321
Tobacco pipe makers, 34
Trades Council, 499
Training School for Police Women, 528
Tramway Company, 467, 533
Union Club, 95
Vintners, 15
Volunteer Regiment, 538
Volunteer Rifle Corps, 389 n. 6
Waggon and Carriage Works Company, 450
War Weapons Week, 540
Warship Week, 540
Waterworks Company, 414 n. 48, 416 n. 61, 421, 423, 424, 425, 426, 456. See also Waterworks scheme in General Index
Weavers' Gild, 34
and West of England Newspaper Press Fund, 528
West of England and South West Building Society, 450
and West of England University (proposed) 500, 503
West India Society, see General Index
Woollen Drapers, 35
Y.M.C.A., 528, 538, 540
Zoological Gardens, 414, 415, 428, 534

Britannia (Blome's) 31; (Camden's), 31
Britannia Buildings, 469
British Antarctic Expedition, 528
British Association, 273 n. 151, 274, 361
British Electric Telegraph Company, 441
British Home and Hospital for Incurables, 516
Britton, John Henshaw, 456 n. 87, 563, 571
Broad Mead, 26
Broad Pill, 319, 323
Broad and Pottow, 333
Broad Quay, 28
Broad Street, 29
Brock, the Rev. Mourant, 432 n. 137
Brokers, 225
Bromley Farm, Stanton Drew, 468
Brooke, Henry, 547; John, 79; Mr., 334
Brooks Memorial Fund, 519
Brougham, Henry, Lord, 362
Brown, Sir Kenneth Alfred Leader, 572; Richard Howard, 464–5, 532, 563, 571
Browne, Henry, 548; Hugh, 43, 82, 275; John, 18 n. 23, 19; Mr., 221
Browning, John, 211 n. 86
Bruce, Robert, 547, 548, 549; Robert, 321, 322; the younger, 274, 548, 552; William, 393, 549
Bruges, 4
Brunel, Isambard Kingdon, 320, 416, 417, 418, 419, 423, 425, 440
Brunswick Place, 342 n. 93, 468 n. 14
Brunswick Square, 91 n. 5
Bryce, James, 491
Buckingham, earl of, 273 n. 150
Buckingham and Chandos, duke of, 275 n. 163, 555
Buckingham Palace, 269
Buckingham Springs, 414 and n. 48
Buckinghamshire, 518 and n. 26
Budd, Dr., 413
Bude, 327
Budgett, Charles Theodore, 562; James Herbert, 448, 559, 569; John Herbert Micklethwait, 563, 571
Bullock, Mrs., 454
Bunt, Mr., inventor of tide gauge, 321
Burges, Lt. Col. Dan, V.C., D.S.O., 452 and n. 54, 539, 560, 570
Burgess, Frederick Charles, 570; William Edward Parry, 557 n. 6
Burke, Edmund, as M.P. for Bristol, 96 and n. 25; on the Irish trade, 124, 128–30; on America, 143 n. 105, 143–4; freedom of SMV, 144; Smalls lighthouse, 168 and n. 117; guns for coasting vesels, convoys etc., 173; pressing of seamen, 174; and wrecks, 222; goods of bankrupts, 235
Burn, John Andrew Southerden, 564
Burn, Mrs., 270
Burnham lighthouse, 326 and n. 139, 327
Burroughs, Jeremiah, 178
Burton, John, 525; Symon, 525
Burton's Almshouse (with St. Nicholas), 525
Bush, Alfred George de Lisle, 556, 559; Athelstan Paul, Treasurer SMV, 449 and n. 40, 452, 562, 564, 573; Claude D'Arcy Stratton, 559; Henry, 251–2, 427 n. 98, 428; Henry, 553; Henry Frederick Tobin, 556; Hugh Godfrey de Lisle, 537–8, 559; James, 290, 552, 553; Robert, 547; Robert Hilhouse, 553; Robin Paul, 564; Mr., 418
Bush Tavern, 238
Buston, Eric, PRO to SMV, 533
Butcher, John, 54
Bute, Marquis of, 317
Butleigh Court, nr. Glastonbury, 460 and n. 118
Butler, Robert, 10
Butter, SMV share in patent for export of, 66; tare on, 69
Butterworth, Reginald Wyndham, 556
Button, Sir Thomas, 78
Bysse, John, 18 n. 23

Cabot, John, x, 446
Cabot Celebration Committee, 432
Cadbury, Major Egbert, 562, 570
Cairns Road, 470
Calabar, 202
Calahan, Cornelius, 202
Calais, 4, 169
Calfskins, patent for export of, 61, 66
Callowhill, Thomas, 191 n. 69

Callowhill Street, 480
Campbell, Richard Plantagenet, see Buckingham and Chandos, duke of
Cambridge, H.R.H. Frederick Adolphus, duke of, 273 n. 151; University of, 447
Camden, William, 30
Camera Obscura, 475, 476
Camp Buildings, 336
Camp Place (alias Litfield Place), 278, 336 and n. 47
Canada, 173, 530; see also Moose Jaw Battalion
Canadian Historical Association, 531
Canals, SMV and, 230–2, 439. See also Bristol and Taunton Canal, Berkshire and Hampshire Junction Canal, Gloucester–Berkeley Canal, Kennet and Avon Canal, Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal
Canary Islands, 38
Canington, Somerset, 282 n. 200
Cann, Martha, 83; Robert, 83; Thomas, 83
Cannage, duty of, 19, 70, 73
Canning, Rt. Hon. George, given freedom of SMV, 550
Cannon's Marsh, 155, 160, 165 n. 95, 281, 346
Caple, Mr., tenant of the Observatory, 475
Capper, Samuel, secretary of Bristol and Clifton Waterworks, 415 and n. 55
Cardew, Peter Gordon, 563, 571
Cardiff, 297, 316, 317
Caribbean Islands, 68
Carolina, 141, 142 and n. 95, 143, 177, 233
Caroline, Queen, 275
Carr, Carre, John, 14 and n. 14, 18 n. 23; William, 18 n. 23
Carrick, Dr. Andrew, 346, 348
Carter's Brewery, 340, 343
Carter-Jonas, Land Steward, 456 n. 87
Cary, Christopher, 64; John, 69, 98
Casamajor, Elizabeth, 206 n. 55; Mr., 171 n. 11
Castle Green School, 477 n. 6
Castle Street, 87 n. 302, 195
Castlemaine, Lady, 29
Catcott, the Rev. A. S., 96
Cathanger, Somerset, 282 n. 200, 352, 354, 355
Cattle Lairs Wharf, 471
Cave, Daniel, 410, 548; Stephen, 548; banker, 107 n. 36. See also Ames, Cave and Company
Cawdor, earl of, 413
Cecil, Robert, earl of Salisbury, 54; William, Lord Burghley, 14
Cecills Litfields, 184, 335, 336
Central Landowners' Association, 518
Cephalonia, 55
Chamberlain, Caroline, 270; Edward Green, 250 n. 5; William Taylor, assistant to Treasurer, 266, 272, 393
Champion, John, 206 n. 54; Richard, 156, 173; William, 153, 154, 194
Champion's Dock (Merchants' Dock), 116, 154, 155, 165 n. 95, 182, 194, 196, 344
Chandos, duke of, 136
Channel Islands, 38
Chapel Pill, 319
Church of England Defence Fund in Wales, 537
Church of England Men's Society, 537, 538
Church Extension Commission, 536
Churchill, Sir Winston, 447, 464, 510, 541, 563
Churchill Memorial Appeal, 527
Churchman, Walter, 92
Cirencester Agricultural College, 456
Civil War, 80, 84
Clare, Lord, see Nugent, Robert
Clarence, duke of, 412
Clark, James, 279; Robert Podmore, 552
Clarke, Charles Cyril, 443, 458, 490, 559, 569; Charles Nigel, 563, 571; Charles Samuel, 460, 461 n. 121, 513, 514, 559, 569; John Esmond Cyril, Treasurer SMV, 542, 487, 523, 525 and n. 86, 562, 571, 573; John Henry, 557; John Oliver Stanley, 564; Joseph Bell, 551; Roger Simon Woodchurch, 546 n. 5, 561, 570; William, 206; Mrs., 331. See also Savery and Clarke

Claxton, Alice, 275 n. 163; Butler Thompson, 261, 548, 549, 550; Captain Christopher, 435, 441; Donald Maclean, 253, 393, 554; Mrs. Donald, 393; Helen, 275; Philip Culpepper, 553; Robert, 549; William, Treasurer, see below; William, son of the Treasurer, 265, 556; Mrs. William, 264–5, 393
Claxton, William, Treasurer, volume on SMV charities, 110 n. 55; on Marine School, 217 n. 118; Treasurer of West India Association, 238 n. 2; criticism of, 249, 250 n. 5; on elections in Hall, 251–2; son Donald in Holy Orders, 253; Tory views of, 254–5; criticisms of SMV, 257–9; career in SMV, 260–5; portrait of, 264; comment on the Surveyor, 269; illuminates Hall at end of Crimean War, 271; Hall dinners, 272; illuminated book on Hall pictures, 275; buys pictures for Hall, 275–6; prepares accounts of SMV 1845–1851, 279 and Appendix E; on the pilots, 317–18; on Water Excursion, 321–2; visits estates, 353–5; report on Colston's Hospital, 364 and n. 40; comment on case of the Colston Charity, 366–7, 369; on Seamen's Hospital, 393; on Chamber of Commerce, 441; on Waterworks scheme, 422–3, 425. Other references: xvii, 212, 267, 270, 273 n. 151, 274, 277, 291, 349, 363, 370, 389, 393, 397, 399, 412, 543, 550, 551, 553, 554, 556
Clayfield, Mr., 348
Clayton, the Rev. P. B., 540
Clements, John, 151
Clergy Stipend Fund, 551
Clevedon, 116, 164 n. 89
Cleveland, duke of, 218
CLIFTON
  Bailiff of, 261, 268
  Chapel of ease in, 437
  Church, 207
  Christchurch, new tower, 430, 437
  College, 386, 437, 446, 447, 484, 511
  Committee for preservation of the Downs, 427
  Committee for public improvements, 428
  Development of, 182–3, 186, 203. See also General Index under particular areas and streets
  Down, stone from, 184; limekiln on, 184; quarries on, 187, 189, 351 and n. 163, 426; encroachments on, 189, 190; conservation of, 190; windmill on, 196 (see also under Observatory in General Index); reservoir on, 415, 417, 425; desecration of, 423, 427; enclosure of, 430; iron ore under, 432. See also under Downs in General Index
  Down Committee, 429
  Down Hotel, 533
  High School, 511
  Hill, 228, 342 n. 93, 344, 414
  Hill House, 91
  Improvement Association, 429 n. 11, 528
  Industrial School, 526
  Infants' School, 385
  Iron from, 280
  Ladies' Home, 391
  Manor of, 17C. plan, 45, 47; 18C. plan, see Wilstar in General Index; 19C. plan, see Illustrations; acquired by SMV, 47, 74, 87–8; income from, 47, 114, 280–1, 282, 342, Appendix E; commoners in, 429 n. 13.
  Market proposed in, 332
  National School, 385, 511
  Parish Church, 187 n. 39
  Parish School, 386, 511
  Parsonage House of, 340
  Petition of, to SMV for water supply, 416–17
  Place, 335, 509
  Poor in, 208
  Observatory, see General Index
  Reservoir, 415, 416, 425
  Roads in, 187–9, 228
  Spa Company, 333 and n. 22
  Suspension Bridge Company, 541. See also Suspension Bridge in General Index
  Vale, 468
  Volunteer Infantry, 405 and n. 5
  Water supply of, 413 ff.

Windmill, 208. See also Observatory in General Index
Wood, new church, 437
Other references: 91, 107, 109, 113, 156, 212, 234, 255, 329, 331, 336, 340, 343, 346, 351, 355 n. 198, 356, 423, 424, 434, 437

Cloth, 2, 5, 8
Clovelly, 306
Clyde, 316
Coal, for the poor, 389 n. 6, 391
Coates, Joseph, 414, 415, 416, 421, 422; Mrs., 414; family, 414, 416
Colchester, 396
Cold Bath, Jacob's Wells, 196 and n. 103
Cole, William, 19 n. 27
College of Commerce, 483
Collings, Anthony Palmer, 547
Collingwood, Admiral Lord, 405, 548
Colonisation, SMV interest in, 85–6, 234
Colonnade, Hotwells, 92, 185, 192, 468 n. 14, 474
Colston, Sir Charles, 519; Charles Edward Hungerford Atholl, 1st Baron Roundway, 560; Edward, 29, 82, 101, 122, 203, 204, 209 and n. 79, 211, 212, 214, 275, 360, 367, 374, 385, 401, 458, 488, 536, 543; E. F., 363: William, 275; Mrs., 431; family, 446
Colston's Almshouse, 29, 113, 117, 122, 203, 204–5, 208, 245, 256, 401–2, 404, 521, 522, 524, 539
Colston's Boys' School (see also Colston's Hospital), in 19C. 373–375; in 20C., 485–8; other references, 266, 374, 458 n. 106, 484, 519, 529, 538
Colston's Girls' School, 266, 375, 376, 470 n. 38, 477 n. 6, 488–91, 519
Colston's Hospital, in 18C., 109–10, 209–15; in 19C., 360–5, 370–5; other references, 105, 113, 122, 204, 226, 244, 246, 247, 249, 250, 256, 265, 271, 272–3, 275, 352, 357, 358, 373, 410. See also Colston's Boys' School and Colston Trust
Colston's Nominees, 109, 110 and n. 55, 123, 210, 211, 212, 214, 361, 363, 364, 371, 372, 373
Colston's Primary School, 489
Colston Trust, dispute with SMV concerning ownership of manor of Monckton in Stogursey, 246–7, 365–70
Colthurst, Arthur Beadon, 537, 558, 568; Edward Beadon, 557, 558; John Edward, 557
Comb, Combe, John, 416 and n. 62; Richard, 129, 130, 183, 184; Mr., 227 n. 49
Comber, Mr., Headmaster of Bristol Trade and Mining School and of MVTC, 372, 378
Combwich, Somerset, 352
Comfort, Robert, 184
Commissioners of Charitable Trust, 401
Commissioners for Endowed Charities, 247
Commissioners on the Health of Large Towns, 420
Commissioners to enquire into Municipal Corporations, 245, 246, 310 n. 23, 311, 322
Commissioners of Sewers, 352, 421
Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, 144, 145, 146, 290
Communications, SMV interest in, 227–31, 303, 306, 440–1
Convent, Litfield Place, 467
Convoys, in 17C., 68, 69, 80, 81; in War of Spanish Succession, 170; in War of Austrian Succession, 170–1; in Seven Years' War, 171–2; in American War of Independence, 172–4; in French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 174; West India Society and, 292
Cook, Captain, 458
Cooke, Eliza, 342; G., 331 n. 8; Isaac, 186; I., 331 n. 8; Robert, Clarencieux King of Arms, 14
Cooper, Philip William Deane, 558
Cope, General John, 178
Copthall Court, 122
Cork, 172, 201
Cork and Orrery, earl of, 413
Corn, imported by SMV for the poor, 221; duties on, 289–90
Corn Laws, 220, 221, 239
Corn Street, 28, 29, 195, 460
Cornett, Samuel, 192
Cornish and Danger, 429

Cornwall, 92, 451, 500
Cornwallis Crescent, Clifton (Lower Crescent), 185, 331, 334 and n. 33, 342 n. 93
Cornwallis House, 331
Coslett, Richard, builder, 342, 343
Cosmo (John Matthew Gutch), criticism of SMV, 294–5; criticism concerning Vick's Trust 303; concerning wharfage lease, 310 n. 23; on SMV management of pilots, 316; on SMV and cranes, 323; other references, 299 nn. 79, 80, 300 n. 83
Cote Charity, 520
Cote Home estate, 513
Cotham, 479
Cotham Secondary School (formerly Merchant Venturers' Secondary School), 479, 484
Cott, Henry, 83
Cotton industry, relief to in American Civil War, 390
Coultings, Somerset, 352, 355
County Hospital, Taunton, 208
County Infirmary, Gloucestershire, 208
Courier, newspaper, 406
Courtney, Mr., proposed descent of Avon Gorge, 427
Coventry, 230
Cowl, Richard, 498 n. 99
Cox, Thomas, 99
Cranbrook Road, 470
Crane Master, 163
Cranes, 75, 162–3, 322–3, 312
Crediton, 207
Creswicke family, 30
Crimean War, 290, 411
Cripps, Fred, of the Palais de Danse, 474
Crispe, Ellis, 79; Mr., proposed lighthouse, 167
Croft Road, Stapleton, 470
Cromwell, Oliver, 68
Crosse, John, 206 n. 54
Crown and Anchor, Hotwells, public house, 344
Cruger, Henry, M.P., 128, 130, 138, 143, 163, 168 n. 17, 171 n. 6, 230
Crush, Mr., artist, 274
Crystal Palace, 269
Cuba, 292
Cullis, John, 322
Culverwell, Cyril Tom, 561
Cumberland, 518 n. 26
Cumberland, H.R.H. Ernest Augustus, duke of, 273 n. 151, 547
Cumberland Basin, 344, 468
Currants, 55
Curtis, Stanley Samborne, Memorial Fund, 520
Customs duties, proposed farm of by SMV, 86
Customs House, see under Bristol
Customs Officers, 63, 64, 68, 157, 218–19, 239, 287
Cutt, Cut, John, feofee 1561, 18 n. 23; also another John, 18 n. 23; William, 18 n. 23
Cuzzins, William, seaman, 200

"Daggering", form of insurance, 222
Dalbiac, Major-General Charles, 274
Daltera, James, Treasurer 1801, 260; Joseph, Treasurer, 106, 109, 115, 188, 206 n. 54, 227 and n. 52
Danger, see Cornish and Danger
Daniel, the Rev. Alexander, 195; Edward, 115; Thomas, Secretary of West India Society, 269, 276, 291, 293, 550; Thomas, the younger, 550
Danson, Edmond, 549: Hugh William, 549: William, 549
Danzic, 221
Darch (with Day), map of Somerset, 233
Dartmouth, 79, 145, 483
Daubeny, George, 107 and n. 36
Davey, George William, tobacco manufacturer, 558, 568; John Stanley, 537, 559: Richard Edmund, 561, 570; Thomas Ruding, 557, 561, 568
Davies, John, builder, 340, 341 and n. 85; Samuel, 206 n. 54; Thomas, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27; Captain Thomas, Havenmaster, 318 and n. 85; Thomas Hosegood, 562; William Weaver, 551
Davis, Edward Thurston, 393, 550; Elizabeth, 83: Richard Hart, M.P., 289, 298, 331, 407, 547; William Henry, 269
Daw, Humphrey, 348
Day, Elizabeth, 206; John, 132 n. 35; Thomas, 206; Sir Thomas, 88; Alderman, 225

Day (with Darch), map of Somerset, 233
Deal, 222
Dean, Whitehead and Co., 118
Defoe, Daniel, 99
Denmark Street, 232, 380
Densham, Humphrey Ashley, 564, 572
Department of Education, 375, 486
Department of Science and Art, 359, 381
Derby, Lord, recruiting scheme, 538
Derbyshire, 518 n. 26
Devenyshe, Nicholas, Mayor of Bristol Staple, 4
Deverell, John, 183–4; Mr., 277–8, 335
Devon, 500
Diary, the, newspaper, 137
Dilliston, Thomas, 201
Dock Estate, development by SMV, 280, 281, 344–6
Dock Gates, public house, 196
Dolben, Sir William, 136
Dolman, John, 192
Dolphin Society, 112
Dominica, 140
Donn, Benjamin, 90, 233, 234
Dorset, 352, 353
Doubtinge, Francis, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27
Dover, 169, 222
Downs, see under Society of Merchant Venturers. Also Clifton Down and Durdham Down
Dowry Chapel, 436
Dowry Parade, 184, 342 n. 93
Dowry School, 386
Dowry Square, 91 n. 5, 184, 186, 188
Draper, Sir William, conservator of Clifton Down, 190
Drew, Edward, 422 n. 833, 551; John, Havenmaster, 318–19; Helen, 519
Dublin, 226, 274, 293
Duddlestone, Sir John, 44, 170
Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, 528
Dulverton, 1st Baron, freedom presented to 1931, 561; becomes a Redemptioner 1938, 562; 2nd Baron Dulverton of Batsford, 564
Dulverton chargers, presented to SMV, 460 and illustration
Duncan, Admiral, 179, 181; Ann, 83
Duncomb, David, 200
Dundas, William, Lord, 181
Dundry church, 536
Durdham Down, 185, 187 and n. 39, 190, 191, 351 and n. 163, 423, 426, 429 and n. 113, 430, 431, 433
Durdham Down, Association for Improvement of, 429
Durham, fire relief fund, 526
Dyer, Robert, 347, 348
Dyson and Parker, 406 n. 63

Eagle, Mr., Commissioner, Municipal Corporations, 366
Eames, D. J., thesis on SMV and Education, see all sections relating to education
Earle, Joseph, M.P., 146; Mr., surgeon in the Dispensary, 399
East India Company, 12, 37, 58, 61, 145, 147, 285, 289
East India Trade, 58–9, 145–7, 287, 289
Eastland Company, 12, 25, 42, 60, 61, 67, 125
Easton, 386
Eaton Crescent, see Hanbury Road South
Eberle, Ellison Fuller, coachbuilder, 449, 460 n. 18, 559, 569, 570; Rear Admiral James Henry Fuller, 565; John Leonard, 572; Victor Fuller, 487, 511, 559, 565, 569; Mr., 333
Edgworth, the Rev. Mr., 352
Edinburgh, 90 n. 1
Edinburgh, duke of, son of Queen Victoria, 412
Edinburgh, H.R.H. Prince Philip, duke of, 447, 530, 563
Edward VI, 13, 16, 17 and n. 19, 41
Edward VII, 411, 412, 502, 529
Edward VIII, see under Prince of Wales
Edward, George William, 376
Edwards, Arthur Mansell, 557; George Dale, 560; George William, 556, 557; Herbert George, 557, 560; Isaac, 199; Reginald Herbert, 560; Sydney William, 557
Eglestaff, Mr., 320

Eisenhower, General Dwight D., 447, 541
Elba, 406
Elderton, Harry, 185; Mr., 334
Elkins, W. H., Chairman of Education Committee, 493 and n. 83
Elizabeth I, 13, 16, 17 n. 19, 19, 41, 53, 55, 464
Ellicott, Charles John, Bishop of Bristol, 436, 438
Elliott, Dr., 466
Elliott's Buildings, 468 n. 14
Ellis, Ellies, John, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27; William, feoffee and alderman 1600, 19 n. 27; another William Ellies, 19 n. 27
Elsworth, Sir Richard, 57 n. 32
Elton, Sir Abraham, 91, 116, 146; Abraham, Town Clerk, 163; Mr., alderman, M.P. for Taunton, 132. See also Tyndall, Elton and Co.
Embargo, 176–7
Emden, 38
Emigration, see Bristol: Migration Committee
Endowed Schools Commissioners, 247, 372, 373, 374, 376, 387
Engine House, Hotwells, 426, 427. See Illustrations
English-Speaking Union, 512
Erith, George, 267, 453, 454
Ernest Augustus, see Cumberland, duke of
Eton College, 353, 365, 368
Evans, Arnold, 559, 569; Henry Somerville, 559, 569
Eveleigh, J., Butler to SMV, 454 n. 66
Evelyn, John, 26
Exchange, see under Bristol
Exchange Bank, 107 n. 35
Exchequer, SMV contribution to in 1931, 527
Excise Bill, 1733, 219–20
Exeter, 12, 54 n. 22, 55, 58, 60, 79, 418, 492

Fairfax, Sir Thomas, 68
Falmouth, 226, 227, 239, 321, 451
Fane, Henry, Clerk to SMV, 106; Thomas, Clerk to SMV, M.P., 106, 226
Farm, Somerset, 282 n. 200, 352, 353, 355
Farm colony for feeble minded, 527
Farr, Paul, 134 n. 50
Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, 294
Ferney Close (later Victoria Square), 336, 337, 338
Fern House, Clifton Down, part of new Merchants' Hall, 461, 463
Ferrier, Professor of Engineering, University College, Bristol, 507
Fez, 83
Fiddington, Somerset, 355
Fiennes, Celia, 29, 30
Finland Appeal, 540
Fire, danger to ships in the port, 222–3
Fisher, George, 117, 119; Mr., 353. See also Kidd and Fisher
Fisher Lane, 18
Fishguard, 181, 324, 327
Fishponds, 386
Fishponds Training College, 386, 526
Fitch, I. G., Assistant Commissioner, Endowed Schools Commission, 372, 373
Fitzroy, A. W., Privy Council Office, 504–6, 506 n. 128, 508 nn. 135, 138
Flanders, 42
Flat Holm, 167 and n. 111, 327, 438
Flax Bourton, 119
Fleet, William, 71
Fling, John, 200
Floating Dock, Sea Mills, 151; proposed in Canon's Marsh, 160. See also Champion's Dock, Merchants' Dock
Floating Harbour, 152, 153–4, 157–161, 242, 274, 307 ff., 307 n. 5, 345
Flood, Thomas, 201
Ford, Stanley H., 519
Foreign Animals Wharf, 471
Forest of Dean, 65, 92, 390
Foster, John, builder, 347
Four Nations Appeal, 540
Fowenns, John, 19 n. 27
Fowler, Alfred, 550; Henry George, 257, 289, 549; James, 548; James, the younger, 548; John, 417 n. 65; John William, 550; Richard Sargeant, 549; Richard Walker, 549; the Rev. Robert Henry, 253–4; William, 550; Mr., 395
Fox, Charles James, 179; Edward

Long, 552; Francis Frederick, 458, 555, 557; Richard Anstice, 557; Washington, 552; William Pool, 557
Foxe, Captain Luke, 86
Foy, Nathaniel, 235 n. 106
Framiload on Severn, 230
Frampton, 290
France, trade with, 6, 7, 11, 38, 54, 55; other references, 37, 62, 121, 160, 176, 179, 284, 307, 406. See also French Company
Franklin, C. D., Surveyor to SMV, 456 n. 87
Franklyn, George Woodroffe, 551; James Norroway, 415; Joshua, 151
Frayne, William, 555
Frederick Adolphus, see Cambridge, duke of
Free Port Association, 304, 308, 312
Free School, near Frome Gate, see under Bristol: Grammar School
Freke, William, 115
French Church, 207
French Company, 50, 51, 54 n. 22, 60
Fripp, Ernest Theophilus, 345; Stewart, 556; William, 403; William, junior, 553; William Danger, 458, 559, 569
Froebel Foundation Training Department, Colston's Girls' School, 489
Frome, Froom, river, 26, 31, 74, 77, 151, 153, 164 n. 88, 165
Fry, Albert, 383; Claude Basil, 458, 486, 519, 559, 569; Joseph, 92; J. S., 483, 492; Lewis, 332, 446, 478, 492, 495 n. 90, 496, 489, 499, 500 and n. 104, 502, 509, 560; family, 384, 494
Fuller, Stephen, 136 n. 64; Thomas, 30
Furzier, Captain John, Master of Marine School, 360

Gage, Christopher, Chairman of Reform Committee, 271
Galbraith, Mr., 346
Gallows Acre Lane (Pembroke Road), 187 and n. 39, 188, 429 n. 116
Gamble, Canon T., 488 n. 67, 519
Gaol, New, 347
Gardiner, Samuel, senior, beadle, Master of Colston's Hospital, 109, 210; Samuel, junior, beadle, Master of Colston's Hospital, 109, 110, 183, 184, 212, 213
Garrard, Thomas, City Chamberlain, 275
Garraways, 339 and n. 73
Gascoigne, John Clive, 563
Gascony, trade with, 2
Gatcliff, Mrs., 488 n. 67, 519
Gaunts' Hospital, 207 n. 62
Gayne, Arthur James, Master of Marine School, 359
George, Alfred, 552–3; Christopher, 551, 553; George Thorne, 551; James, 547, 548; James, 548, 551, 552; James Thorne, 552; Philip, 552; Mr., 403
George, H.R.H. Prince, duke of Kent, 530
George I, portrait in Hall, 275
George II, 178, 232, 275, 407
George III, 178, 276, 407, 409
George IV, 270, 273 n. 151, 407
George V, 529
George VI, 527, 530
George Inn, 47, 87 n. 203, 195
Germany, 57
Giant's Cave, Clifton, 427, 474, 475, 476
Gibb, The, 151
Gibbons, William, 547
Gibbs, George, senior, 547; George, junior, 547; George, runaway schoolboy, 214
Gifford, William, beadle, 7
Gild Merchant, 1, 3
Gin, SMV on dangerous effects of, 219
Gladstone, William, 290
Glanville, Sir John, Recorder and M.P., 33
Glasgow, 90 n. 1, 146, 147, 168, 237, 293, 316, 325
Glastonbury, 226, 460, 537
Globe, newspaper, 406
Gloucester, 221, 228, 313, 418, 421, 440, 441
Gloucester–Berkeley canal, 231, 439
Gloucester, bishop of, 517
Gloucestershire, Local Education Authority, 489; Lord Lieutenant of, 515; M.P.s for, 137, 227, 287; Territorial Association, 540; other references, 92, 177, 256, 282, 373, 500, 514

Gloucestershire and Somerset Feasts, 112
Godfrey, Mrs., 190
Godwin, James Colthurst, 559
Goldney, Mrs. Ann, 117; Thomas, 228; Mr., 118, 183, 187, 427 n. 98
Goldney House, 332, 459–60
Goodbody, W. S., Surveyor to SMV, 456 n. 87
Goodwin, Mr., 186
Goodwin Sands, 168
Gordon, John Adams, 564, 572; Captain, 175
Gorges, Sir Ferdinando, 85, 531
Gorse Lane, 344 and n. 113
Gosport, 359
Goughe, Peter, 19 n. 27
Grand Spa Hydro, 334 n. 30
Grant, George, 552
Granville, Lord, see Somerset, Henry Charles
Grasholm Island, 167
Grasse, Admiral de, 234
Grateful Society, 520
Graves, William, 19 n. 27
Graving Dock, 76, 261, 345
Great Crane, 75, 162
Great Dock, 73
Great House, St. Augustine's Back, 30, 33 n. 32, 34, 371. See Illustrations
Great Western Railway, 274, 281, 345, 346, 413, 439, 441, 532
Great Western Steam Packet Company, 345
Great Western Steamship Company, 304, 311
Green, Frederick William, 308 n. 13, 552; William, 276
Greenwich Hospital, 197, 394 n. 84
Gregory, Charles, 183; Mr., 415 n. 55
Greiffenhagen, Maurice, R.A., portrait of W. W. Ward, 452 n. 51
Grenada, 140
Gresford Colliery disaster, 527
Grey, Sir Edward, 506; Lord, 530
Griffith, Richard, Clerk to SMV, 65
Grove, new quay at, 116, 153, 154, 224
Guildhall Coffee House, London, 396
Gunn, Henry Sommerville, 459, 562, 570; Henry Wills, 520
Gutch, John Matthew, see under Cosmo
Guthrie Memorial Church, Clifton College, 437
Guy, John, 53, 79, 85, 531
Gwyer, Edmund, 394, 552; Samuel Vowles, 250–1; Thomas, 400; William Orchard, 551
Gyttons, John, 19 n. 27

Haberfield, John Kerle, Mayor of Bristol, 272, 420, 424
Hackshaw (also Alexander), Lydia, 121
Hagan, Mr. and Mrs., managers of the Observatory, 475
Haig, Field Marshal Sir Douglas, 446, 539, 560
Hain, William, builder, 342
Haldane, R. B. (later Viscount), 500
Hale, 107 n. 35
Hales, Dr., 234
Halifax, earl of, 234
Hall and Parker, parliamentary agents, 417 n. 65
Halton, John, 18 n. 23; Robert, 18 n. 23
Hamburg, 57, 87; Company, see Merchant Adventurers of England
Hamilton, Henry, 173 n. 18; Captain William, 172
Hammond, Mrs. Eleanor, 120, 245; Mr., 418
Hampden, John, 65
Hanbury Road, 333, 343
Hanbury Road South (Eaton Crescent), 343
Hancock, Ann, 201; John, 373
Hanging Wood, 541
Hanham, 208
Hannan, William, Havenmaster, 76
Hanover Street, 480
Harbour of Refuge, 306, 327–8
Harding, James, 201; Jane, 202; John, 551
Hare, Charles, 553; Charles Bowles, 552; Charles Bowles, junior, 555; Charles Francis Aubone, 559; Henry Grace, 555; John, 273, 555; Sholto Vere, 250, 254, 263, 273, 553
Harford, Charles, 103 n. 8; Charles Lloyd, 550; James, 550; Joseph, 407 n. 15; Richard Summers, 550; Samuel, 301, 550; Summers, 550

Harley Place, 342 n. 93, 414
Harris, Mr., 147
Hart, Arthur, 276; Sir Richard, 204; William, 179, 218
Harvey, Charles, 547, 549: Charles Octavius, 555; Edward Napier Deane, 561; John George Russell, 558, 561, 568; John St. Clair, 561, 569; Robert Russell Stobart, 561, 570
Hassell, James, 259, 552; Robert, 555
Hauteville, Mr., 417 n. 65
Havelland, Havellande, Matthew, 19 n. 27; Robert, 19 n. 27; William, 19 n. 27
Havenmaster, SMV's role in appointing, 75–7; work in 18C., 161–2; control of pilots by, 164; work in 19C., 318–20; under City Docks Committee, 1861, 319; and the watermen, 320; watchtower and pew for, 321; other references, 47, 315, 316
Hawksworth, William, 218
Haynes, William, senior, beadle to SMV, Master of Colston's Hospital (1766–85), 155 n. 29, 156, 214; junior, beadle to SMV, Master of Colston's Hospital (1785–1836), 110, 268, 275, 360, 361, 362 n. 30, 353
Haythorne, John, 409, 547
Haywood, Thomas, Master of Hall School, 215, 216
Heaven, W. H., 327
Heber, Denty and Co., 471
Hellicar, John, acting Treasurer 1876, 265, 355, 551; Joseph, Treasurer 1816, 260, 366, 547; Thomas, redemptioner 1803, 547, 549; Thomas, 550, 551; Valentine, 257, 550; Mr., 418; Mr. Warden, 256. See also Ames, Hellicar and Sons
Hemming, Mr. (owner of Lansdowne Place), 337, 338
Henbury, Lords of manor of, 429, 430; commoners of, 429, 431; vicar of, 520
Henleaze Road, 460
Hensman, the Rev. John, 371, 385, 437
Hensman Memorial Church, 437
Hentley, Richard, 18 n. 23
Henville, Mrs. Benedicta, 206; Richard, 206
Herbert, Charles Frederick, 349; John, 202
Hesse Darmstadt, Grand Duchess of, see Alice, Princess
Hibbs, Mrs., 183, 184, 187
Hibbyne, Arthur, 19 n. 27
Hicks, Hickes, Thomas, 10, 18; William, 19 n. 27, 22
Higgons, George, feofee 1561, 18 n. 23
Higham, E. J. G., Clerk to SMV, 456
High Street, Bristol, 27
Hilhouse, Abraham, 409, 548; George, 322, 345, 547; James Martin, 187, 547, 548, 549; Martin, 318 n. 85, 549; Robert, 548; Mr., 157, 162, 181
Hill, Charles, 556; Charles Gathorne, 557, 562; Charles Loraine, 562, 571; Edward Burrow, 310, 557; John Charles Gathorne, 563, 572, 573; Richard, 564, 572; Thomas William, 403; Charles Hill and Sons, shipbuilders, 345
Hill's Almshouse, 403, 521, 524–5
Hillman, Major Valentine Albany, 559
Hine, John, 33 n. 32
Hinton, Edward, 549
Historical Association, 530–1
Historical Association of Newfoundland, 531
Hobb's Yard, Bristol, 73
Hobbs, John, 368
Hobhouse, Mr., 163, 184, 186
Hoblyn, Robert, M.P., 222, 235 n. 106
Holder, William, 547
Holland, 42, 146
Holland, John, 224; Joshua, 210; Philemon, 30
Holledge, James, 206 n. 54
Hollidge, Mr., 183
Hollister, Captain, Havenmaster, 161
Holmes Lighthouse, 327
Holworthy, Dame Susannah, 216, 217
Home Guard, 475, 540
Home and Hospital for Jewish Incurables, 516

Homer, John, Havenmaster, 161
Honeypen Hill (Richmond Hill), 184–5, 185 n. 20, 186 n. 28, 188, 189, 190, 330, 332, 335, 351, 352, 417
Hong Kong, 293 n. 47
Honiton, 208
Hooke, Andrew, 183; Humphrey, 41, 43, 67
Hooper, Anthony Stewart, 546
Hopkins, John, 19 n. 27, 23; Thomas, 83, 85
Horfield, barracks, 538; school, 386
Horse Fair, Bristol, 20
Horse and Groom, public house, Jacob's Wells, 196 n. 103
Hort, Mrs, 116, 117
Hosegood, Harold Maurice Corner, 563; Hugh Lionel Evans, 560, 569; John Alan Corner, 564
Hoskins, Mrs., 83
Hotwell, the, leased out by SMV, 88; in 18C., 191–4; in 19C., 346–51; House, Pump Room, engine etc., 181, 188, 347–8, 348 n. 140, 351; road to, 48, 73, 74, 187; water, disputes over, 241–2, 349; water, sent to India, 347; water, possibility of radium in, 474; other references, 92, 93, 100, 114, 165, 185, 241, 242. See Illustrations
Hotwell Point, 351
Hotwells, district, brickyard, 196; gunpowder magazine, 330; SMV property in, 342 n. 93, 344, 468, 469, 471; other references, 91, 109, 165 n. 95, 182, 188, 189, 228, 321, 329, 351, 352, 356, 417, 526
Hotwells Road, 333, 344
Housing Association, possible interest of SMV in, 546
Howell, Charles Peter Branstrom, 554
Hudson, artist, 276
Hudson's Bay, 62, 145, 148
Hughes, John, 76
Huguenot Church, 207 and n. 62
Hull, 12, 57, 146, 147, 169, 198 n. 3, 296, 396
Hulton, Mr., 419, 420
Humphries, Basil John, 560
Hungarian Relief Fund, 527
Hungary, flood relief, 390
Hungroad, 19, 70 and n. 82, 72, 162, 164 and n. 91
Huntingdon, Lady, chapel of, 186
Hurle, John, 551
Hydraulic lift, see Rocks Railway

Ilfracombe, 321
Illustrated London News, 273 n. 150
Ilminster, 226
Imperial Tobacco Company, 513, 517
Indentured servants, 59
India, 289, 293 n. 47, 347, 390, 441. See also East India Company, Indian Mutiny
Indian Mutiny, help for sufferers in, 390
Industrial Home for Girls, Knowle, 386
Insolvent Debtors Act, 287, 349
Institute of Mechanical Engineers, 531
Interregnum, 68
Ipswich, 201
Ireland, trade with, 11, 26; 38, 69, 93, 104 n. 16, 124–5, 127–31, 139, 177, 306; Bristol as possible packet station for, 303, 440; relief of distress in, 389, 390; other references, 19, 60, 81, 99, 148, 168, 218, 235
Irish Volunteers, 128
Iron, American, 141; ordinance concerning, 5; on Clifton Down, 432
Irwin, Mariana, annuity sold to, 121, 122
Isle of Man, 146
Italy, 4, 37, 126

Jack the Painter, see Aitken, James
Jackson, Joseph, 43, 275; Alderman, 111
Jackson-Roeckel Teachers' Provident Association, 520
Jacob's Wells, Methodist chapel, 437; playhouse in, 100, 196 and n. 103; other references, 187, 208, 333, 344, 414, 418
Jacob's Wells Road, 344, 468
Jamaica, 81, 131 n. 34, 136, 139, 140, 172, 175, 202, 527
James, Edward Burnet, 253 n. 25, 557, 560; George Anthony Burnet, 564; Gilbert Sydney, 560, 570 and

n. 4; R. C., Surveyor to SMV, 456 n. 87; Stephen Guy Burnet, 563, 571; Captain Thomas, 86, 531; Walter Burnet, 560
James I, 55, 62, 63, 79
Jarvie, Mr., 453
Jay, John, explorer, 446
Jefferies, William, Treasurer of the General Subscription 1745, 178
Jenning's Stable, Hotwells, 344
Jessop, William, engineer, 158 n. 49, 159, 160
Jews, hostility to in mid 18C., 97, 104 n. 19, 234; relief of in Russia, 390
Johnson, Robert, 19 n. 27
Jolly, James, Havenmaster, 318, 319, 320
Jones, Averay Neville, 309, 470, 557; Charles, 191 n. 69; Edward, 319; Evan, 206; George, 334; John, 319, 344; John Averay, 552, 557; Owen, architect of Crystal Palace, 269–70; Philip, 363; Richard, 203; Richard, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27, 82, 196, 203; William, 319, 344; Mrs., 454
Jose, Christopher Henry, 562; John Edmund, 556; John Edmund, 562; Thomas Porter, 259, 263 n. 79, 275, 552, 553, 556; Thomas Porter Hatt, 556; William Wilberforce, 383, 553

Kelke, John, 18 n. 23; Thomas, 13, 18 n. 23
Kelston Park, 528
Kemball, Lieutenant, Master at Marine School, 357–8
Kennett and Avon Canal, 230
Kent, duchess of, mother of Queen Victoria, 411, 412
Kentucky, 512
Kersteman Road, 470
Kidd and Fisher, 347
Kidwelly, 211
Kilkenny, H., butler to SMV, 454 n. 66
Kindersley, Mr., 370
King David, public house, Hotwells, 188, 196
King, Arthur William, 555; Charles Mervyn, 558; Christopher John, 564; Edmund Ambrose, 555, 561, 562, 568; Edmund Poole, Treasurer 1962–69, 452, 561, 570, 571, 573; Frank Ambrose, 557; Gregory, 36; Herbert Poole, 555; Mervyn Kersteman, 448–9 and n. 35, 451, 470, 488 n. 67, 497, 513 and n. 2, 555, 558; Norris Hampden, 562; Percy Liston, Treasurer 1901–14, 265, 266, 276, 450, 457 n. 88, 492 n. 80, 494 nn. 84, 86, 87, 88, 495 n. 90, 498 n. 99; 500 nn. 104, 105, 501 nn. 108, 109, 502 nn. 110, 111, 505 nn. 122, 123, 124, 556; Richard Jenkins Poole, 254, 309, 551, 556; Thomas Poole, 250; Thomas Poole, 556; William Poole, 551; William Thomas Poole, 553, 555, 556; Mr., 238
King Square, 9 n. 5
King Street, 28, 45, 271, 358, 398, 457
King's College, London, 483
King's Parade, 437
Kingroad, 164 and nn. 89, 91, 438
Kingsdown, 31, 478
Kingston, Mr., 118, 140
Kingswood, 98; church at, 207; reformatory at, 386, 389 n. 6, 391
Kinnersley, C. H., Clerk to SMV, 456
Kinsale, 81
Kirklington estate, Cumberland, 518 n. 26
Kitchen, Kitchin, Abel, 19 n. 27; Robert, 275
Kneller, Sir Godfrey, 275
Knight, John, junior, of the sugar house, 34
Knowle, church of Holy Nativity, 438 and n. 186; Industrial Home for Girls in, 386
Knox, Thomas, 187
Kyrle Society, 474

Labouchere, President of Board of Trade, 396
Ladies' Home, Clifton, 391
Lamplighters' Hall, Shirehampton, 166, 167, 318, 348
Lancashire, 94
Lancaster, 168, 173, 234 n. 103
Land's End, proposed long ship at, 168
Lane, Odiarne Coates, 554; Richard, 33

Langdale, Lord, Master of the Rolls, 368
Langhorne, Mr., 321
Langley, Philip, M.P. 1571, 14 n. 14, 20 n. 34
Langton, Gore, 428–9
Langton and Company, 335
Lansdown, Dr., 467
Lansdowne Place, 337, 338
Laroche, Sir James, 193, 202; Mr., 202
Lassall, William, 327
Latimer, John, xiii and *passim*
Laurier, Sir Wilfred, Prime Minister of Canada, 530
Law and order, SMV views on, 286, 407–8
Lawrence Weston, 520
Lazenby, F. G., Secretary of St. Monica's, 515 n. 8
League of Nations Union, 528
Leat, Sergeant-Major Thomas, porter to SMV, 453
Lee, Charles, Headmaster Bristol Grammar School, 101
Leeds, 93, 418
Leeds College of Science and Technology, 379 n. 114
Leek Lane, 480 and n. 23, 482, 489 n. 39
Leeward Islands, 81, 172
Legg, Herbert, master of SMV school, 216
Leghorn, 126
Leicestershire, 352–3
Leigh Road, 333 n. 26, 342
Leigh Road East, 343 and n. 99
Leigh Road West, 343 and n. 99
Leigh Woods, 415, 433, 434
Leigh Woods Land Company, 433, 541
Leith, 147
Lennards Ltd., 330
Letters of Marque, 63
Levant Company and Levant Trade, 55–7, 42, 58, 60, 67, 145; other references, 12, 42, 69, 125 n. 5
Lewin's Mead, 26
Lewis, Abraham, 161; David, 163; John, Headmaster of Colston's Hospital, 361, 362–5; William, 399
Lexington, 144
Leyson, David, 7
Library Society, 233
Lifeboats, 327–8
Lighthouses and lightships, SMV interest in, 167–9, 324, 326–7
Lilford estate, 518 n. 26
Limekiln Dock, 188, 345, 436
Limekiln Lane, 187 n. 39, 188, 196, 198, 199 n. 20
Limekilns, the, 228
Lincolnshire, 352, 353
Linen, Irish, 127
Litfield Place, 333 n. 26, 336 and n. 47, 467. See also Camp Place
Litfields, 184. See also Cecills Litfields
Liverpool, advantages over Bristol, 94, 230, 288, 296, 316; population compared with Bristol, 90 and n. 1; consultation and cooperation with Bristol, 130, 131 n. 4, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136 and n. 64, 140, 145, 146, 147, 168, 171, 224, 234 n. 102, 287, 289, 293, 325, 396; other references, 126, 127, 137, 159, 237
Liverpool, earl of, 550
Liverpool University, 498, 499
Llewellyn, Richard, 117 n. 115
Local Defence Volunteers, 475
Locking, Somerset, 208, 235, 352, 353, 354, 367, 485; Church at, 537; moor, 235
London, Londoners, conflict with over soap monopoly, 34, over trade monopolies, 21, 49, 52–62, 131, 148, over wine duty, 285; cooperation with, over growing of English tobacco, 68, over taxation of Levant trade, 69, over concession to Ireland, 130, over African trade, 133, over Molasses Act, 141, over Stamp Act, 142 and n. 98, over slave trade, 136, 137, 138, over convoys, 171, over the navy, 176, over calicoes, 219, over West Indies, 292–3; other references, 93, 126, 131, 132, 144, 146, 148, 151, 161, 168, 179, 192, 218, 223, 227, 230, 234, 237, 238, 253, 262, 271, 296, 395, 396, 411, 416, 418, 422, 433, 439, 440, 483, 504. See also Monopolies, the various companies for overseas trade, and chapter 3 for comparisons of London with Bristol
London and South Wales Junction Railway, 440

London Armourers and Brasiers Company, 458
London Bridge, 29
London Tavern, Association at, 130
London University, 492, 497, 498, 499
London Vintners Company, 66, 67
Londonderry, 337
Long, Longe, Richard, M.P., 67, 82, 275
Long Parliament, 66–7
Longman, Ezekiel, 233
Loos, battle of, 538
Louisville, Kentucky, 512
Love Street, Hotwells, 188 and n. 47, 342 n. 93
Lovell, Mary, 205
Lowe, F. W., 432; R. M., 432
Lower Crescent, see Cornwallis Crescent
Lower Slip, the, 73
Lucas, Charles Phipps, 555; Mrs. E. A., housekeeper to SMV, 453; Edward Colston, 557; Edward Thomas, 553; John, 552, 554, 555; John Elton, 550; John Frederick, 554, 556, 557; Thomas, 552, 554
Luke, Mrs. J., 454
Lullington estate, Derbyshire, 518 n. 26
Lumber, 140
"Lumpers", employed instead of seamen, 232–4
Lundberry, Mr., 158
Lundy Island, 79, 178, 306, 315, 321, 327
Lunell, George, 345, 549, 552; John Evans, 256, 336, 337, 365 n. 46, 548; Peter, 549; Samuel, admitted 1816, 549; Samuel, admitted 1844, 552; William Peter, 407 n. 15, 409, 548, 549
Lury, John Elton, 550
Lyall, Mr., 395
Lyde, Lionel, 139
Lyme (Regis), 54 n. 22, 80, 106 n. 34
Lyndhurst (Pembroke Road), 343 n. 105

McAdam, John Loudon, 351, 352
McArthur, Allan, 558, 561, 568; Alan John Dennis, 561, 570, 571; and company, 461 and n. 127, 462
Macartney, James, 172
MacDaniel, James, 201
McKenzie, Murdoch, 233
Mackie, David, master of Marine School, 358
Macpherson, the Rev. A. C., 466
McWatters, George Edward, 564; Arthur Michael, 565
Madeira, 453
Madder, 5 n. 15
Magdalen College, Oxford, 446, 451
Mail Packet Station, for Ireland, 440. See also Portishead
Maismore, 228
Mallard, Mr., 163
Malvern, 257
Man, Captain, 172
Manchester, 90 and n. 1, 234 n. 102
Manchester University, 497, 499
Manila House, Clifton, 433
Manor House, Clifton, 509
Mansion House, London, 273 n. 150
Maple's, furniture shop, Bristol, 468
Mardon, John Kenric La Touche, 563, 571; Julian John St. Clair, 565
Margaretts, the, Jacob's Wells, plot of land on which Playhouse was built, 196 n. 103
Marie Alexandrovina, Grand Duchess, 421
Marine Board (Board of Trade), 325, 326, 359, 360
Marine School (Mathematical or Navigation School of SMV), origin and early history, 216–17, 217 n. 118; combined with SMV Writing School, 216; united with the Bristol Marine School 1839–1844, 357–8; separated from Bristol Marine School 1844, 358; subsequent history, 358–60, 376
Marine Society, 239 and n. 10, 357–8
Mariners, see under Seamen
Mariners, Gild of, see under Bristol
Market, proposed in Clifton, 332
Marlborough Castle, 230
Marmont, Mr., SMV Superintendent and Receiver for Clifton, 268–9, 329 n. 1, 336, 337, 340, 350
Marseilles, 69
Marsh, Bristol, 72, 76
Marsh Street, Bristol, 203, 269, 457, 460, 461
Marshfield, 363

Martin, George Palliser, 560, 569 and n. 1
Martin's Coffee House, on the Green, 198
Mary, Queen, wife of George V, 529
Maryland, 131 n. 34
Mason, Arnold, A.R.A., portrait of Gerald Beloe, 452 n. 55; Mr., of Wrenmore, 354
Mathematical School (Navigation School), of SMV, see under Marine School
Matlock, 333
Matthews, George Leonard, 557; Thomas Gadd, 557
Maudlin Street Hospital, 539
Mawnan Smith, near Falmouth, 451
May, Captain Edward, 120
Mayoress, of Bristol, fund for Reduced Ladies, 391
Maze, James, 549; Peter, admitted 1817, 549, 550, 552; Peter, admitted 1826, 257, 550
Mead Close, Clifton, 468
Mediterranean, 79, 126, 144, 168, 441
Mediterranean passes, 126
Meke, George, beadle 1500, 7
Melcombe Regis, 80
Mellyne, William, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27
Melville, Henry, 1st Viscount, 286, 548; 2nd Viscount, First Lord of the Admiralty, 549
Mendips, water from, 424
Mentmore Estate, Buckinghamshire, 518
Merchant Adventurer, use of term, ix and n. 1
Merchant Adventurers, of England, ix, 11, 12 and n. 8, 42, 57–8, 61
Merchants, "at large", 143, 238–9, 240, 319
Merchants' Almshouse, see under Society of Merchant Venturers
Merchants' Arms, public house, Prince Street, 532; Stapleton, 470, 532
Merchants' Avenue, Hotwells, 344
Merchants' Dock (Champion's Dock), 105, 108, 117, 154, 155 and n. 29, 156–7, 222, 261, 345 and n. 119, 346, 438, 471, 543. See also under Dock Estate
Merchants' House (later Merchants' Hall), 461
Merchants' Parade, Hotwells, 342 n. 93, 344
Merchants' Place, Hotwells, 342 n. 93
Merchants' Road, Clifton, 332, 340, 343
Merchants' Tolzey, see under Bristol
Merchant Venturer, use of term, ix, 6, 7
Merchant Venturer, the, public house, Redcliffe Hill, 532; train, 532
Merchant Venturers' Secondary School, see under Cotham Secondary School
Merchant Venturers, Society of, see under Society of Merchant Venturers
Merchant Venturers' Technical College (originally the Bristol Trade and Mining School, then the Merchant Venturers' School), origin and growth in 19C., 375–385; new building in Unity Street 1885, 377; appointment of Juluis Wertheimer in 1890, 378; adopts name in 1894, 380; financing of and relations with city's Technical Instruction Committee, 380–381; overlapping with other institutions and conflict with University College Bristol, 381–5; in 20C., 477–84; destroyed by fire, 1906, 477–8; conflict with University College over proposed University of Bristol, 491–510; later developments, 478–84; taken over by L.E.A. 1949, 484; other references, 450, 451, 543. See Illustraions
Meredith and Company, 504 n. 119
Mereweather, Mr., 135
Merrick, William, 343
Merrywood School, 381
Mersey, river, 316
Messenger, H., 519
Methodists, 436, 528, 537
Middleburg, 83
Middleton, Lord, 211 and n. 86; Mr., 417 n. 65
Miles, Edward Peach William, 554; John William, 254; Henry Cruger William, 264, 554; John William,

554; Philip, 291; 403; Philip John, 554; Philip John, gamekeeper of Clifton, 190; Philip William Skynner, M.P., 254, 255, 308 n. 13, 309, 396, 397, 421 n. 79, 425, 552 and n. 4; William, 158, 421 n. 79, 425; William St. John Fenton, 515
Miles Road, 333 n. 26, 342
Miles Vaughan and Company, 277
Milford Haven, 81, 440
Miller, Lady, 330
Millerd, James, 26 and n. 10, 28, 29, 35, 85, 90
Milton, John, Mayor of Bristol, 4
Milton Keynes estate, 518 n. 26
Minchinton, Professor Walter, xviii
Ministry of Education, 489. See also Board of Education
Ministry of Health, and St. Monica's, 515–17. See also Board of Health
Minty, John, 116
Mitchell, Alexander Black, 445 n. 18, 560; George, master of school under the Hall, 357
Mohun, Lord, 64
Molasses, 69; Act concerning, 1733, 141
Monkton, Monckton, Monckton Holme, manor of, in Stogursey, 114, 123, 208, 212, 352, 355; dispute over, 365–70
Monmouth, 221, 403
Monopoly, attempts by SMV to establish, 10–16, 22, 40–41, 49–51; opposition of SMV to, 51–62, 125, 131–5, 145–8, 225, 285; willingness of SMV to share in, 66–7
Montenegro, 539
Montpelier, Clifton Down, windmill at, 196 n. 103
Moon, A., caretaker of Merchants' Hall, 453–4, 454 n. 65
Moor, E. R., Prime Minister of Natal, 530
Moorfields, 437
Mooring posts, 72, 164, 321, 323
Moose Jaw Battalion (128th Canadian Battalion), 539
Moreton, Francis, 348
Morgan, C. Lloyd, Principal, University College, Bristol, 383 n. 132, 384, 494; Daniel, 214; George King, 555; G. M., 519; Mr., 169; Miss, 427 and n. 94
Morley, Samuel, 254
Morning Post, 464
Morocco, 221
Morrice, Edward, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27
Moseley, Alfred, 433; Canon Henry, 373 and n. 70, 375
Mounslow, Martha, 201
Mowat, Professor, 458 and n. 110
Muller, Mary, housekeeper to SMV, 453
Mumbles Light, 168
Munckley, Samuel, 117
Mundy, Peter, 25, 28
Municipal Corporations, Commission of Enquiry into, see under Commissioners
Muscovy Company (Russia Company) 12, 25, 61, 125 and n. 5
Muster Books, Seamen's Hospital Fund, 198

"Nails", the, 28
Napoleon, 161, 180, 286, 405, 406
Nash, Captain, 171 n. 6
Nash Point, 324, 326
Natal, 530
National Association for Employment of Reserve Soldiers, 528
National Lifeboat Association, 327–8
Nautical School, Portishead, 510
Navigation Acts, 68, 69, 139, 396
Navigation School, of SMV, see Marine School
Navy League Sea Cadet Corps, 540
Nelson, Horatio, 180
Nelson Street, Diocesan School, 375; Bristol Trade and Mining School, 375–7
Ness Sands, 166
Netherlands, 11, 12, 37, 57
Newbery and Spindler, 466
Newcastle, 12, 57, 60, 326, 480 n. 21
Newcastle, duke of, 178
Newcombe, William, 192
New England, proposed colony in, 85
Newfoundland, voyages to, 18; proposed colony in (Bristol's Hope), 85; merchants trading to petition against abolition of slave trade, 138, 240; trade with, 144–5, 177; boys from Colston's Hospital

Newfoundland—*cont.*
apprenticed in, 360–1, 361 n. 17; fire in St. John's, 390; insignia presented to St. John's, 531; other references, 446, 530
New Hotwell, 191–2, 415
New West India Society, see West India Society
New York, 349, 438
New Zealand, 530
Newman, Mr., 107 n. 35
Newnes, George, M.P., 334
Newport, 297, 315, 316, 317
Newstead, George Pope, 558
Newton, Francis, 224
Nicholas, Captain, 181
Nicholson's gin, advertisement for on site of Hall, 462
Nickalls, Joseph, engineer, 158 and n. 49, 159
Nightingale Valley, Leigh Woods, 541
Nile, battle of, 180, 273
Nile Expeditionary Force, photograph of Churchill as special correspondent, 464
Noble, John, 116, 117; Mr., 156
Noel, the Rt. Hon. Geoffrey, see Waldegrave, 12th Earl of
North, Roger, 36; Lord, 128, 130, 144
Northamptonshire, 518 and n. 26
Northern Assurance Company, acquires site of old Hall, 463, 524
North Somerset Yeomanry, 537
North West Passage, 86, 531
Norwich, 25, 26, 27
Nottingham, 93
Nova Scotia, 234
Nugent, Robert, Lord Clare, M.P., and the Irish trade, 127, 128 and n. 16; on the African trade, 134 and n. 50, 135; on American affairs, 142 and nn. 97, 98, 147; on the East India Company, 146; on convoys, 171 and nn. 10, 11, 172; other references, 167, 219, 222, 225, 226 and n. 48, 232 n. 85
Nutte, Thomas, 18
Nyasaland, Farm Institute in, 527

Oakfield Place, 343
Oakfield Road, 333 n. 26, 343 and n. 99, 446–7
Oakham, Oakham Slade, 190, 191
spring, 474
Oaklands, Pembroke Road, 343 n. 105
Oatley, Sir George, 515
Observatory, Clifton Down, leased to Mr. West 1828, 427–8; proposal to replace by Cabot Memorial, 432–3; in 20C., 474–6; listed as Ancient Monument, 475 n. 76; illuminated, 540, used by Home Guard, 540. See also Bristol: Observatory Company, and Clifton: windmill. See Illustrations
Observatory Hill, Clifton, reservoir on, 425, 431, 433, 529, 540
Oil, 5, 68, 144
Old Hotwell, 414
Old Hotwell House, 415
Old Play House, Jacob's Wells, 203
Oldfield Road, Hotwells, 346
Oldfield Terrace, Hotwells, 469
Ontario, 531
Openshaw, Edith M., Memorial Fund, 519
Orchard Street, Bristol, 380
Ord, Colonel Frederic Cusac, 253 n. 25, 558, 568
Orders in Council, 1807, 285–6
Orkney Islands, 233, 540
Ormerod, Mr., 330
Osborn and Wallis Ltd., 471
Osborne, Jere, Clerk to SMV 1873–1919, 267–8, 451, 455; Jeremiah, Clerk to SMV 1786–1795, 133 and n. 47, 138 and n. 70, 267; Jeremiah, Clerk to SMV 1801–1842, 267, 370; John, Clerk to SMV 1796–1810, 107, 267, 370; Robert, Clerk to SMV 1838–54, 267, 421 n. 80, 440; Mr., 258, 337, 364
Osborne and Ward, solicitors, 417 n. 65
Osborne, Ward, Vassall and Company, 451, 504 n. 119
Over's Causeway, Gloucestershire, 228
Owen's College, Manchester, 379 n. 114
Oxford University, 85, 447

Paddington, 532
Padmore, Mr., engineer, 193

Palais de Danse, Barton Hill, 142
Palmer, John, 227 and n. 55; Mr., 272
Pares, Professor Richard, 94
Paris, 271
Park Place, 330, 335, 468, 538
Park Row, Asylum for Hopeful Discharged Female Prisoners, 391
Park Street, 187
Parkway Methodist Church, 537
Parlby, Major J. R. H., House Governor of St. Monica's, 515 n. 8
Parochial Medical Association, 392
Parret, river, 177
Parrish, W. C. R., scholarship, 519
Parry's Lane, 433
Parsons, John, 214; Mrs., 190
Partridge, Ernest John, 564
Pass, A. Capper, 541
Patriotic Fund for Soldiers and Sailors in the Russian War, 390
Paty, James, 156; Thomas, 92, 111 and n. 71, 234; William, 154, 155 n. 29, 156, 185; Mr., 156 n. 37
Paul, Charles, 554, 557, 558; Charles Henry, 557; Major Courtenay, 538; Walter Reginald, 558; Walter Stuckey, Surveyor to SMV, 269, 456, 469, 538; William Edgar, 538, 558
Paulett, Colonel, 128th Canadian Battalion, 539
Payne, Charles, Secretary of West India Society, 291
Peach, Samuel, 278
Pearce, Mrs. Frances, 402
Pearse, John, 83
Peloquin, Mary Ann, 116, 117
Pembroke, earl of, 85
Pembroke Hall, 333
Pembroke Road (Gallows Acre Lane), 330, 333, 342, 343, 431
Penarth, 317
Penarth Road, 438
Penke, John, 7
Penny, Captain, 172 and n. 14, 175
Pepwell, Pepwall, William, 18 and n. 23
Pepys, Samuel, 26–7
Percival, John, 314; Spencer, Prime Minister, 406; Bishop of Bristol, 492
Perkins, Edward, 256, 548; Thomas, 548; Thomas, manager of the Hotwell, 192, 193; Thomas Paul, 548
Perkins, John, and Sons, 460
Perks, John Hyde Haslewood, 462 and n. 134, 563
Perry, William, 547
Persia, 125
Philips, John, 168
Piazza, Hotwells, 192
Pigott, Mr., 196 n. 103
Pill, bridge at, 323; cholera, 392; church at, 437; dock at, 308; poor of, 208, 391; pilots of, 235, 316; road to, 228; school at, 385; telegraph to Bristol, 441 and n. 215; Warner at, 441 n. 215; Westwardmen of, 319
Pilots, recommended and controlled by SMV, 72, 75, 165–7, 241, 313–318; towboats of, 181; conflict with watermen, 319–20; relief of distress, 390, 392; Sunday work by, 235; criticism of, 316; SMV proposes to give up control of, 1840, 316; SMV loses control of, 317–18
Pinney, Charles, 551, 553; Frederick Wake, 553; Mr., 418
Pirates, of North Africa, 47, 65 and n. 60, 79, 221; Irish, and others, 68, 78; English, 221–2
Pitching and Paving, see Commissioners for
Pitman, Christian Ernest, 563, 571; Mark Christian, 565
Pitt, William, 130, 179, 180, 274, 433. See also Pytt
Plaister, Rachel, 119
Plankage, lease of, 19, 70, 73, 312
Playfair, Professor, 359; Dr. L., 413
Play House, Jacob's Wells, 197 and n. 103, 203
Plymouth, 55, 79, 81, 396
Pocock, Nicholas, 233, 234, 458
Poirier, Samuel, Secretary of African Company, 135 n. 56
Poland, 37
Police, 99, 232, 409
Polygon, Clifton, 331, 334 and n. 33, 342 n. 93
Poole, Dorset, 80, 145
Poole, James, 318
Pope, Andrew, 552; Andrew Noble, 558, 569 and n. 1; Charles, 206 n. 54; George, 258, 259, 552, 554,

Pope, Andrew—*cont.*
555; George Henry, Treasurer SMV 1876–1901, Secretary of Merchant Venturers' Technical College 1901–20, 265, 266, 276, 381 n. 123, 382, 383 and nn. 130, 134, 384, 450, 451, 479, 492 and n. 80, 493, 494, 495 and n. 90, 500 and nn. 105, 106, 503 n. 115, 504 nn. 120, 121, 505–6, 507 n. 129, 508 and n. 135, 554, 568; John Noble, 555, 558; Sarah, 115
Popham, John, Recorder of Bristol, 14 n. 14
Port Kerry Bay, 314
Port and Pier Railway, 352, 460
Portbury, proposed pier at, 308
Porters, Company of, 76
Portishead, 303, 308, 309, 314, 320, 438, 510; proposed Steam Packet Station at, 440
Portishead Passage, 228
Portishead Pier and Railway Company, 309
Portishead Point, 228
Portland Square, Bristol, 91 n. 5
Portsmouth, 202
Portugal, trade with, 2, 11, 21 n. 37, 38; other references, 19, 20, 21, 37, 68, 144
Postal service, 226–7, 440–41
Potato blight, 389, 391
Pottow, see Broad and Pottow
Powder House, on the Avon, 319
Powell, Arthur Cecil, 558, 568; George, 330; Richard, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27; Samuel, 185, 193, 348; Timothy, 115, 118; William Augustus, 555, 558
Preston Pans, battle of, 178
Price, Captain John, 216, 217; H. C., 269; Rice Williams, 549
Prin, Prynne, Edward, first Master of SMV, 10, 17 and n. 17; Erasmus, 17 n. 22; Martin, 72
Prince of Wales, Charles, son of Elizabeth II, 447, 530, 565; Edward, later Edward VIII, 530, 560 and n. 9; George, son of George III, 548
Prince of Wales, public house, 480
Prince of Wales Jubilee Thanksgiving Fund, 527
Prince of Wales National War Relief Fund, 537
Prince Philip, see Duke of Edinburgh
Prince Street, Bristol, 100
Prince's Buildings, 185 and n. 23, 330, 333, 334 and n. 30, 469
Prince's Place, Clifton, 186
Princess Royal, Mary, entertained by SMV, 530
Privy Council, and the University of Bristol, 502–8
Prizage, dispute over, 63
Probert, Benjamin, 184
Pro-Cathedral, Roman Catholic, 352
Proctor, Alderman Thomas, 281, 336, 432
Proctor's Fountain, 351, 533
Protheroe, Edward, 547; Henry, 547; Philip, 291, 393, 440, 547, 548, 551; Mark Davis, 551; Mr., 260, 547
Prussia, 411
Public Ledger, newspaper, 137
Pugh, Daniel, 348
Pullman Road Refreshment Car Co., 462
Purveyance, dispute over, 63, 68
Putney Home for Incurables, 516
Pytt, John, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27. See also Pitt

Quakers, 34, 97, 103 and n. 8
Quarantine, 126–7, 324
Quarries, 184–5, 189, 351–2, 391, 432
Quays, 31, 47, 71, 73, 74–5, 151–2, 153–4
Quay Warden, 77, 181
Queen Mother, Elizabeth, visit to Hall as Duchess of York, 530; entertained at Hall, 1966, 530
Queen's Building, University of Bristol, 484, 510
Queen's Road, Bristol, 330, 331
Queen's Square, Bristol, 91, 150, 223, 232
Quilter, David Cuthbert Tudway, 565

Radford, E., butler to SMV, 454, 460
Radley School, 451
Raglan, James Henry Fitzroy, 1st Baron, 549; 2nd Baron, 412, 553
Railways, see under Bristol for Bristol and Exeter Railway; Bristol,

South Wales and Southampton Union Railway; Bristol and Gloucester Railway; Bristol and Clifton Railway. See General Index for Great Western Railway, London and South Wales Junction Railway, Port and Pier Railway, Portishead Port and Pier Railway, South Wales Railway, South Wales, Wiltshire, Somerset and Weymouth Railway, West Cornwall Railway
Rainey, Robert, 257, 549
Ralph, Elizabeth, and storage of SMV records in War, 460; archivist to SMV, 465, 532
Ramsey, William, schoolmaster, 216
Ramsgate, 169
Rankin, I. W., Chairman of Chamber of Commerce, 305
Ravenstone estate, 518 n. 26
Rawdon, Marmaduke, 27
Rea, Catherine, 201; T. E., Chief Clerk to SMV, 267, 453
Reading, 418, 439, 492
Red Cross, 527, 540
Red Maids School, 30, 100, 373
Redcar, harbour, 327
Redcliffe, Redcliff, 26, 31, 153, 159; Free Grammar School in, 30
Redcliffe Day School, 511
Redcliffe Endowed School, 511
Redcliffe Hill, 532
Redfield, mission room at, 536
Redhill, Clifton, 187
Redland, 187, 340, 465, 490
Redland Court, 91, 191
Redland Court Road, 470
Redland Green, 470–1 and n. 38
Redland High School, 511
Reed, William Bateman, builder, 338, 339; Mr., 280
Reeve, William, 393
Reeves, Mr., 352
Reform Committee, Bristol, 1831, 271
Reservoir, Clifton, 414–15, 416, 417, 423, 25–6
Reynolds, Joseph, schoolmaster, 216; Sir Joshua, 276; Richard, 403
Richmond Court, Clifton, 342 n. 93
Richmond Hill (Honeypen Hill), 185 n. 20, 331, 466; nursery ground at, 471–2. See also Honeypen Hill
Richmond Hill Improvement Association, 331
Richmond House, 509
Richmond Spring, 414 and n. 48, 415, 416, 417, 418
Richmond Terrace, 331, 414, 467
Ricketts, Frederick, 551; Thomas, 393
Ringer, Charles, 552
Ringstead and Addington estate, 518 n. 26
Rivers, survey and removal of obstructions, 72; conservation of, 164–5, 320–1
Rivers Cottages, 509
Roach, Solomon, 156, 196 n. 103
Robe, Captain Edward, Havenmaster, 319
Robertes, John, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27
Roberts, Field Marshal Earl, 273 n. 151, 446 n. 19, 558. See Illustrations
Robertson, David Neilson, 562
Robins, E. C., architect, 377 n. 105
Robinson, Alfred Esmond, 449, 461 n. 121, 561, 564, 569 and n. 2, 570 n. 3; Professor Andrew, Principal, Merchant Venturers' Technical College, Dean of Faculty of Engineering, 478–9, 479 n. 20; Anthony Leonard à Court, 565; Foster Gotch, 449, 456, 464, 511, 517–18, 560, 570 and n. 4; John Esmond, 564; John Foster, 563; Lt. Col. Percy Gotch, 562, 569, 570; Richard, 309, 551; Thomas Lloyd, 564; Lt. Commander Vivian John, 562
Robson, Mr., 377
Rocks Railway, Clifton, 333, 334, 540
Rodney Admiral, 234
Rogers, Corsley, 162; Gerald Percival Vivian, 562; George, alkali manufacturer, 252, 553; Hugh Charles Innes, 563, 571; James, 206; Richard, 188; Tracy Percival, 562, 570
Roger's Hotel, Weston-super-Mare, 255
Roman Camp, so-called, Clifton, 427
Rosebery, Lord, 518
Rosemary Street, 477, 479
Rosser, Edward, 117; Joseph, schoolmaster, 216

Rothley, Thomas, Collector for Seamen's Hospital, 198, 199, 200, 202
Rotterdam, 192, 207
Round Point, 312, 320 and n. 99
Roundway, Baron, see Colston, Charles Edward Hungerford Atholl
Rowberowe, John, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27
Rowland, Charles, 470; Thomas, 14
Rowland Avenue, Stapleton, 470
Rowlatt, Richard, Headmaster of Colston's Hospital, 365, 372, 373
Rownham, 48, 74, 154, 159, 228, 318
Rownham Ferry, 188, 235, 321
Rownham Meads, 195
Rownham Passage, 73, 88
Rowse, Thomas, 256
Royal Africa Company, 33, 59–61, 131, 132, 209 n. 79
Royal Agricultural Show, 533
Royal Commission on Health of Large Towns, 1843, 413
Royal Fort, 91
Royal Geographical Society, 528
Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, 483
Royal Sanitary Institute, 531
Royal West of England Academy, 510, 511
Royal West Indian Steam Packet Committee, 440
Royal York Crescent, Clifton, 331 n. 8
Roydon Villas, Clifton, 343 and n. 103
Rudgeway School, Fishponds, 386
Ruhleben, seamen interned at, 539
Rum, 136, 140, 145, 219, 290, 292
Russell, Lord John, 272; Joseph, 349; Earl, 273 n. 151
Russia, 125, 290, 390, 412. See Patriotic Fund for Soldiers and Sailors in the Russian War
Russia Company, see Muscovy Company
Russian Red Cross, 539
Rutland, 518 and n. 26
Rysbrack, statue of William III, 232, 234
Rye, 169, 396

Sadleir, Sir Ralph, 17 and n. 22
Sailors' Home, Bristol, 360
St. Agnes, Cornwall, 169
St. Andrew's, church school, 510
St. Augustine's, 391 n. 41, 418, 421, 510, 511
St. Augustine's Back, 30, 33 note 32, 34, 122, 153, 164 n. 88, 371
St. Bartholomew's Hospital, 30
St. Brandon's Clergy Daughters School, 511
St. Christopher's, 201
St. Clement's Chapel (of the gild of Mariners, used as the Merchants' Hall), 6 and n. 20, 17 and n. 22, 18, 19, 22, 45, 70, 81
St. Eustatius, 140
St. Gabriel's, Easton, 386, 437 and n. 184
St. George's, Brandon Hill, 208, 421
St. George's Channel, 168, 173
St. George's church, vicarage house, 207
St. James's church, 26, 27; Fair, 27; parish, 208, 245 and n. 8, 421
St. John's, Bristol, 27, 31
St. John's, Clifton, 429
St. John's, Newfoundland, 390, 531
St. John's Ambulance Corps, 528, 540
St. Jude's, church, 536; school, 510
St. Leonard's, church, 27; school, 386
St. Malo, 224
St. Mark's Hospital, Bristol, 26, 27
St. Mark's school, Easton, 386
St. Martin, 140
St. Mary Redcliffe, 27, 253 n. 26, 435; school, 386, 511
St. Matthew's, Moorfields, 437 and n. 185
St. Michael's, 201, 205, 421, 436
St. Michael's Hill, 26, 29, 122, 203, 204
St. Monica Home of Rest, The, history and development of, 513–519; W. W. Ward and, 451; Miss G. E. Whitaker and, 454–5; Nurses' Home of, used as temporary headquarters for SMV, 455; Charter Day service held in chapel of, 540; modernisation of, 546; other references, xi, 276, 446, 450, 461 n. 21, 468, 530, 544. See Illustrations

St. Nicholas', Almshouse, 525; church, 27, 228, 436; school, 386; street, 228
St. Paul's, Bedminster, church, 389; home for girls in distress, 537; parish, 421; school, 386
St. Peter's Hospital, 304, 320, 391 n. 41, 389, 434
St. Philip and St. Jacob, 207, 208, 436
St. Silas, school, 386
St. Simon, school, 386
St. Stephen's, church, 47, 84, 94, 97, 207, 536; parish, 208, 232, 253n. 26, 436, 440, 521
St. Vincent's, 122
St. Vincent's Parade, 185 and n. 23, 321, 342 n. 93
St. Vincent's Place, 468 n. 14
St. Vincent's Rocks, 320 n. 99, 427
St. Vincent's Spring, 474
St. Vincent's Terrace, 342 n. 93
Salisbury, earl of, see Cecil, Robert
Sallee, corsairs from, 79, 221
Salmon, John, 371, 551, 554–5; Robert Henry, 554–5
Salmon fishing, bill concerning, 235
Salt, 5
Salterne, William, 21
Salutation Inn, Rownham Mead, 195
Salvation Army Emergency Service, 540 n. 114
Sanders, Thomas, 403
Sandford, John, 19 n. 27
Sandford Place, 346 n. 127
Sandford Road, 469
Saumarez, Captain, 172
Saunders, John, 18 n. 23; Captain, 151
Savage, Francis, nephew of William Claxton, 551, 552; John, 370, 551
Savery and Clarke, 338
Savile, Charles Cornelius, 558, 568
Schools Inquiry Commission, 371
Scilly Isles, 173, 175, 326
Scotland, 69, 389
Scott, Captain Robert, of the Antarctic, 528; Captain, 172
Scriffen, Mrs, 398
Scripture Readers' Association, 526
Scrope, Thomas, 106 n. 33
Scudamore, 'a Romish priest', 201
Scull, Thomas Rodney Rupert, 563
Sea Fencibles, 320, 405
Sea Mills, 151 and n. 4, 187 n. 39, 228, 318, 319
Seamen, examination and registration of, 324–6; foreign, 223–4, 324; help for disabled, 181, 404, 392; legislation concerning, 223, 324; pressing of, 172, 174–5; raised for Navy by SMV, 175–6; regulations concerning, 42; wages of, 223–4, 240
Seamen's Friendly Society, 438
Seamen's Hospital Fund, origin, 197–8; Muster Books, 198; Collector, 198; proposed building of, 198; plans of, 198–9; pensions paid from, 200–2; in 19C., 394–8; proposals to take away from SMV, 395 ff.; taken over, 398; Claxton's comment on, 398
Seamen's Institute, Avonmouth, 536
Seddon, Ralph, 189
Seeton, William Charles, Master of Marine School, 359
Senegal, 135 and n. 56
Serbia, 539
Severn, river, 78, 165, 177, 228, 230, 231, 235, 321
Seward, Henry Hake, architect, 347, 348
Sewerage, provision for in SMV Waterworks bill, 421 and n. 79
Seymour, Henry, of Redland Court, 191
Shapland, Christopher, 419, 420
Shaw, Samuel, 144
Sheffield, Lord, 285
Sheffield University, 480 n. 21, 497, 498, 499
Sheffield Waterworks Company, 390
Sherborne Villas, 333 n. 26
Sheriff, Edmund, master of SMV school, 357
Shields, 326
Ship, the, public house, Redcliffe Hill, 532
Ship Money, 64, 65, 80
Ships, insurance of, 175; proposed assessment of for poor rate, 287; protection of, 77–81. See also under Convoys
SHIPS, NAMES OF
Albion, 347; *Alborough*, 175; *Alexander*, 200; *Amity*, 78; *Anna Maria*, 139; *Antelope*, 172; *Black Prince*, 200–1; *H.M.S. Bristol*, 531; *Clifton*

Ships, Names of—*cont.*

Ark, formerly the *Mary*, of New York, 438; *Columbus*, 393; *Concord*, 78; *Demerara*, 314 and n. 54; *Dominic* (*Domynike*), 17 and n. 20; *Dreadnought*, 78; *Duchess of Bedford*, 458; *Duke of Bedford*, 458; *Eliza*, 314; *Ely*, 321; *Falcon*, 164 n. 92; *Formidable*, 389 n. 6, 510, 526; *Garland*, 170; *Garrick*, 314; *Great Britain*, 411, 531, 551; *Hanover Planter*, 320; *Hardwicke*, 171 n. 6; *Henrietta Maria*, 86; *Hope*, 175, 224; *Humber*, 172; *Hyaena*, 175; *Invincible*, 175; *James*, 78; *Jean Baptiste*, 315; *Juba*, 201; *Lizard*, 175; *Long Ship* (lightship), 326; *Looe*, 172; *Marie Celeste*, 315; *Marquis of Granby*, 202; *Mary*, of New York, later the *Clifton Ark*, 438; *Mary Galley*, 171 n. 6; *Matthew*, 78; *Milford*, 172; *Monck*, 84; *Phoenix*, 78; *Port Mahon*, 171 n. 6; *Nile*, 349; *Prince Edward*, 171 n. 6; *Queen Elizabeth*, 175; *Resolution*, 175; *Royal Charlotte*, 173 n. 23, 174 n. 24; *Sapphire*, 170; *Somerset Privateer*, 165; *Speedwell*, 201; *Susannah*, 175; *Three Brothers*, 173 and n. 23, 174 n. 24; *White Angel*, 78; *William*, 201

Shipman, Thomas, feoffee 1561, 18 n. 23

Shipowners, Society of, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327

Shipwrecked Mariners' Association, 526

Shipwrecked Mariners' Benevolent Society, 390

Shipwrights, illegal combination of, 235

Shirehampton, 18, 47, 84, 166, 321, 441

Shorland, James Rowe, builder, 342

Short Grove, Clifton, 185

Shrewsbury, Drapers' Company of, 53, 54 n. 20; waterworks at, 418

Sidmouth, Lord, 407

Sierra Leone, 135

Silk, 125, 142, 289

Silvester, Mr., first master of Colston's Hospital, 210

Sinclair, Robert John, 562, 571

Sion Springs, 414 and n. 48, 416, 417, 418

Slavery, SMV and abolition of, 293–4; effect on William Claxton of abolition of, 262

Slaves, taxes on by the colonies, 135–136, 143; rising of, 201; distemper among, 201, 202

Slave trade, SMV's part in opening of, 59; SMV's attitude to South Sea Company over, 147–8; SMV and proposed abolition of, 136–9, 140, 239–40. Other references, xi, 37, 38

Small Street, 19 n. 27, 30, 232

Smalls, lighthouse, 168

Smart, Ann, 202; Samuel, 202

Smeaton, John, engineer, 153, 158 and n. 49, 159, 193

Smedley's Hydropathic Establishment, Matlock, 333

Smith, Adam, 61; Christian, Miss, 339 n. 66; Eliza, née Jones, 206; Henry, 188; Jarritt, M.P., 128 and n. 16, 142 n. 98, 179; Joseph, 311 n. 25; Mariana, see Irwin; Robert, 1561, 18 n. 23; Robert, gamekeeper of Clifton, 190 and n. 61

Smythe, Sir John, of Ashton Court, 416 and n. 62; Sir J. Greville, lord of the manor of Henbury, 431, 433; Sir John Hugh, 118; Peter, feoffee 1561, 18 n. 23; Dr. Thomas, 118

Snell, Benjamin, 111

Sneyd Park, development in, 429 and n. 116

Snygg, Snygge, George, Warden SMV 1564, 18 and n. 23; George, junior, 18 n. 23, 19

Soap, duties on, 290; soap making, 34, 65, 68

Social and Industrial Department of Diocese of Bristol, 537

Society of Archivists, 531

SOCIETY OF MERCHANT VENTURERS, THE

Admission fines, 40–1, 44–5, 103, 251–2

Almshouse (formerly of the Gild of Mariners), in 16C., 18–20; in 17C., 81–3; in 18C., 203–4; in 19C., 398–401; in 20C., 521–5; during air-raids, 455, 458–60; uncertainty concerning future of, after the war, 461–3, 522–3;

decision to rebuild, 522–4; other references, 29, 48, 84, 114, 115, 196, 203, 208, 245, 280, 522, 543. See Illustrations
Apprenticeship, in 17C., 40, 41, 44; in 18C. 102, 104; in 19C. 104; premium of £300 required from 1765, 104; investigation of in 19C., 249–50; new regulations concerning, 250–1; recommendations concerning in 20C., 443, 444 n. 15, 445
Arms, grant of, 1569, 14; damage in blitz, 460
Arts sub-committee, 458
Assistants, 12 in 1618 ordinances, 39–40; reduced to 10, in 1639, 41; in 17C., 43; Court of, 43; number of members serving as in 17C., 43; changes in method of election in 19C., 258–9; recommendations concerning, 1930, 443; in 20C., 449. See also Standing Committee
Attendance at Hall meetings, in 17C., 40, 43; in 18C., 104–6; in 19C., 256–7; in 20C., 442–3
Beadle, in 1467, 5; duties defined 1618, 40; office combined with that of Clerk 1639, 42; work in 17C., 43, 47; also appointed Master of Colston's Hospital (see under Samuel Gardiner, senior; Samuel Gardiner, junior; William Haynes, senior; William Haynes, junior)
Building Land Committee, 340, 341, 432
Bulk purchases by, 86
Charitable Trust, 546
Charitable work, see in particular, 17–20 for 16C., 81–4 for 17C., 197–209 for 18C., 388–404 for 19C., 513–28 for 20C. See also Merchants' Almshouse, Colston's Almshouse, Hill's Almshouse, Burton's Almshouse, Seamens' Hospital Fund; The St. Monica Home of Rest
Charity Investment Pool, 520
Charters and Acts of Parliament relating to constitution of, Charter of 1552, 10–12; Charter of 1566, 13; Act of Parliament, 1566, 13–14; Act of 1571, 15–16; Charter of 1639, 41–2; Charter of 1643, 42; Charter of 1665, 42. See Illustrations
City Government, relations with the merchants up to 1552, 5–9; and the Charter of 1552, 12–13; hostility to Act of 1566, 14–16; reconstitutes SMV, 1605, 22–3; dominated by Merchant Venturers in 17C., 32; less dominated by SMV in 18C., 95, 240–1; receives cooperation from SMV, 232; conflict with SMV, 241–242; changing relationship with SMV in 19C., 243–4; the problem of port dues, 296–9; cooperation with SMV over Floating Harbour, 307–8; the Docks Committee and SMV, 309–10; insult to SMV over Victoria's Coronation Procession, 410; conflict over Waterworks bill, 424–5. See also Cranes, Downs, Pilots, Wharfage.
Clerk, duties defined 1618, 40; in 17C., 43; in 18C., 106–7; in 19C., 267–8; in 20C., 455–6
Criticisms of, by Cosmo, 294–5; in print and at public meetings, 384, 423–4; over Waterworks scheme, 423–4; concerning Richmond Hill Nursery, 472; concerning Victoria Square Gardens, 473; by Privy Council Office, 506; concerning Downs roundabout, 535. See also Cosmo
Deeds, schedules of, xviii, 108 and n. 46
Dinners, suppers, balls etc., 43, 47, 106, 112, 113, 271–4, 529–32, 537
Downs, preservation of in 18C., 189–91; in 19C., 426–34; denial by SMV of intention to enclose, 430; City Council proposes joint action concerning, 431; Act of Parliament concerning, 1861, 431–2; Downs Committee and role of SMV, 432–4. See also Clifton Down, Durdham Down
Education Trust, 452, 479, 481 n. 7, 483 and n. 37, 484, 486 n. 56, 509

Society of Merchant Venturers, The —*cont.*
- Exploration, 85–6, 531
- Feoffees, 17–19
- Finances, in 17C., 46–8; in 18C., 113–23; in 19C., 276–83; in 20C., 282–3, 465; Claxton's Accounts and Estimates, 1845–1851, 279–83 and Appendix F
- Freedom boxes, 548, 549 n. 1, 552 n. 4
- Hall, formerly the chapel of St. Clement, in 17C., 28, 45–6; inventories of contents, 45–6; seating capacity of, 104 n. 7; alterations to in 18C., 111, 115; chandeliers, 111, 459; used by others, 111–12, 150, 180; alteration to in 19C., 269–70; dinners in, 271–4; Fancy Dress Ball, 1867, 273 and n. 150; distinguished visitors to in 19C., 273 and n. 151; in 20C. up to World War II, 457–8; air-raid precautions, 458–9; air-raid damage, 459–61 and 461 n. 121; temporary substitute for in Nurses' Home, St. Monica's, 461; discussion about rebuilding damaged Hall, 461 ff.; Fern House acquired 1945 as temporary hall to be known as the Merchants' House, 462; decision not to rebuild and sale of site, 463; Auckland House acquired in 1949, 463; decision to make Fern House and Auckland House, the Promenade, into new Hall, 463; work on the new Hall, 463–4, 529; treasures in, 532; pictures in, 45, 111, 234, 275–6, 455, 458 n. 106; other references, 6, 81, 92, 114, 150, 238. See Illustrations
- Hall Books of Proceedings, xvii; microfilm of, 532
- Hall meetings, 21–2; 1618 ordinances concerning, 39–40; 1639 ordinances concerning, 42; 18C. rules on procedure at, 110–11; question of recording protests at, 260
- Honorary Members, in 17C., 45 and n. 30; in 18C., 102–3; in 19C., 249, 286, 405, 411; in 20C., 442, 446–7, 530
- Land Steward, 456
- Loyal Addresses and Memorials, in War of Austrian Succession, 178; in Seven Years' War, 178–179; in American War, 179; in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 179–80, 405–8; on law and order, 1819, 407–9; on banking crisis of 1825, 409; to George IV, 409; to William IV, 409; to Queen Victoria and other members of royal family, 412–13; to Edward VII, 529; to George V, 530
- Marine School, see General Index
- Master, 1552, 10; 1566, 13; 1569, 14; 1605, 21; duties of, 1618, 39; method of election, 1639, 42; in 17C., 43; not to stand twice in succession, 106; casting vote, 112; method of election in 19C., 258; contested election 1855, 259; casting vote, 260; in 20C., 448–9; knighted while in office, 449; gifts to Hall, 449; election dinner given by, 449–450; list of, since 1900, Appendix D
- Members, number of, total, x; in 17C., 36, 45; in 18C., 102; in 19C., 249; in 20C., 442
- Membership, qualifications for, 1552, 10–11; 1566, 14; 1605 ordinance, 22; 1618 ordinances, 40–1; exclusion of Quakers from, 103 and n. 8; regulations concerning in 19C., 249–50; regulations 1851, 250–2; exclusion of clergymen from, 253–4; right to exclude from, 443–4; discussions and regulations concerning, 1945–6, 444; memorandum on, 1967, 444–5; nature of at present day, 447–8. For Admission to, 1800–1974, see Appendix A. For analysis of qualifications of, 1800–1899 and 1900–1974, see Appendices B and C
- Officers, 1552, 10; 1618, 40; 1639, 41; work of in 17C., 43; changes in 19C., 258; present practice concerning, 499–50

Patrimony, in 17C., 40, 44; in 18C., 102; in 19C., 249, 253–4; in 20C., 442
Politics, 32–3, 254–5, 408–9, 448. See also under individual M.P.s
Property of, in 17C., 87–8; in 18C., 182–96; in 19C., 329–356; in 20C., 466–76; Claxton on the importance of, 281.
Public Relations, 529–33
Records, loss of, 9 and n. 24; concern for in 18C., 108–9; attempt to interest members in, 458; storage in war, 460; care for in 20C., 464–5, 532; microfilming of, 465
Redemptioners, in 17C., 41, 44, 46–7; in 18C., 102; in 19C., 249, 251, 252; disagreement concerning admission of, 251–3; in 20C., 442; qualification of in 20C., 443, 444 n. 15, 445, 446
Religion, reconstruction of churches in 18C., 97, 207; SMV defends in 1819, 407–9; help to Church of England in 19C., 435–8; help to Church of England in 20C., 537–5; other references, 33, 47, 82, 84, 96, 234, 410, 411, 436, 437, 448
Resignation, attempted in 1861, 256; members free to offer, 443; in 20C., 445 n. 18
School for poor mariners' children (also known as the school under the Hall and the Writing School), early history, 18, 30, 84; in 18C., 215–16; combined with SMV Marine School (Mathematical or Navigation School), 216; amalgamated with Bristol Marine School, 1839, 357; end of, 358. See also General Index, Marine School
Senior Commoner, role in elections, 449–50
Standing Committee, first reference to, 43–4; in 18C., 105–6; role in 20C., 449–50
Surveyors, 456, 469, 470, 473, 522, 524
Technical College, see General Index
Tobaccosharessub-committee, 517
Treasurer, in 17C., 40, 43; in 18C., 107, 117; in 19C., 257–8, 260–8; office united with that of Secretary to MVTC and Colston Trust, 265; separated from it, 265–6; re-united with it, 450; in 20C., 450–2; committee on duties of, 1932, 452; division in Standing Committee over election of, 452; staff of in 20C., 453–5, list of, since 1900, Appendix E. See also under individual Treasurers
Wardens, 1552, 10; 1564, 18; 1566, 13; 1569, 14; 1605, 39; in 17C., 43; method of election, 258, 449; list of, since 1900, Appendix D
Waterworks scheme, see General Index
Wharfage lease, see General Index
World Wars, 537–41
Somerset, 92, 137, 177, 221, 227, 233, 235, 268, 269, 282, 352, 354, 373, 403, 467, 489, 515
Somerset, Lord Edward, 549; Henry Charles, Lord Granville, 551; James Henry Fitzroy, 1st Baron Raglan, 549; Canon Lord William, 364
Somerset Cottages, 468
Somerton, 226
Soup Committee, 208
Soup Kitchen, 391
South America, 285, 286. See also South Sea Company
South Carolina, 141, 143
South Sea Company, 132, 145, 147, 148
South Wales Railway, 290
South Wales, Wiltshire, Somerset and Weymouth Railway, 440
Southampton, 25, 492
Southmead Hospital, 539
Southwell, Edward, 235 n. 106; Mr., M.P., 222
Spa Hotel, Clifton, 333, 467
Spafford, George Oswald, 253 n. 25, 557, 568
Spain, trade with, 2, 11, 19, 20, 21, 37, 38, 53, 68; other references, 36, 37, 40, 139
Spanish Company, establishment of, 20; Bristol branch of, 20–1; re-established 1604, 21; Bristolians withdrawfrom, 50, 53 andn. 18, 60

Spanish depredations, 139, 170, 238
Spanish Town, 140
Sparks, Beatrice M., 520
Spaxton, Somerset, 389
Speke, Captain, 273
Spicer's Hall, Bristol, 5, 6, 28, 42, 87
Spindler, see Newbery and Spindler
Spirits, SMV objects to tax on, 219; traders in, 238, 240
Spithead, 173
Springs, in Bristol, 414–17
Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, 230
Stamp Act, 142
Stanfast, Elizabeth, 116 and n. 109
Stanstead College Trust, 520
Stanton, C. H., Schools Enquiry Commissioner 1864, 371–2
Stanton Drew, 468
Staple, the, 3, 4 and n. 10, 12; statute of 1353, 3
Stapleton, move of Colston's Hospital to, 371; development of SMV land at, 469–70; other references, 282 n. 10, 352, 355, 374, 451, 465, 532, 544
Stapleton church, 207
Stapleton National School, 386
Stapleton Rectory, 486
Star Chamber, 64
Steadfast Society, see under Bristol
Stedder, Mr., 395, 397
Stedder, Stephen Henley, Collector of Wharfage, 311 n. 25; 312 n. 39
Steel, American, 141
Steel, William, 76
Steep Holm, 438
Stephens, Elizabeth, 83; William, 83
Steward, Captain, 170
Stillingfleet, Isaac, 234
Stirling, John Douglas Pye Smith, 564
Stoate, Mr., 354
Stock, Edward Herbert, 559
Stogursey, dispute over ownership of manor of Monkton, 365–70; charity fund, 391; parish school, 526; other references, 114, 123, 196, 207 and n. 68, 212, 279, 316, 352, 353, 543
Stoke (Bishop), 187 n. 39, 228
Stoke Bishop War Memorial Fund, 520
Stoke Park, 433
Stokes, John, warden of merchants 1500, 7
Stokes Croft, 421
Stone's, builders, 470
Stothert, George Kelson, 345 and n. 122
Stourbridge, 230
Stourton, 230
Stratford, Ferdinando, 229
Stratford on Avon, 230
Stratton, Major Gilbert Leonard, 562
Stride and Co., 122
Stroudwater, the, 230
Sturmy, Samuel, 84
Sugar, sugar refining, 33, 34, 69, 139, 292
Summerson, Mr., 333
Sunderland, 326
Surveyor of Highways, Clifton, 331
Suspension Bridge, Clifton, xi, 303–304, 434–5, 534
Sussex, Duke of, 273 n. 151
Swansea, 169
Sweden, 37
Swymmer, Sarah, 206; William, 206
Symondes, Thomas, senior, 17 n. 22, 18 n. 23; junior, 18 n. 23, 19

Tallow, opposition to use of in soap-making, 68
Taunton, 132, 208, 231, 233
Taylor, Alfred Terrett, 556; Geoffrey Goodenough, 562; John, M.P., 32, 33; Herbert John, 556; Sir Lionel Goodenough, 449, 560, 569; Thomas Terrett, 252, 309, 555, 556; Miss, 333; Mrs., 402
Teasdale, Mr., 467
Technical Instruction Committee, of Bristol, 380 and n. 119, 384, 385, 477
Teck, Mary, Duchess of, 273 n. 151, 413
Telford's Bank, 453
Temple, district of Bristol, 26, 31; parish school, 385
Temple church, 27, 436
Temple Colston's School, 511
Temple Meads Station, 529
Temple Street, 33 n. 32, 229
Templeton, Lord, 120
Tenby, 73, 321, 327
Thayer, James, pilot, 166–7

Theatre Royal, Bristol, 100

Thomas, Christopher Wilson, 565; Joseph, and Partners, builders, 184; Miss L.E., 454, 460; Richard, 321; Mr., 111 n. 70

Thompson, John, 547

Thornton, Christopher, 256

Three Tuns, Clifton, 228

Tide gauge, 321

Tiverton, 54 n. 22

Toad, Anthony, secretary to G.P.O., 227 n. 52

Tobacco, SMV opposed to growth of in England, 61, 68; industry, 34, 35

Tobacco Act 1789, objections to, 220

Toc H, 528, 540

Tocker, Mr., Master of Colston's Hospital, 210

Todd, A. R. Middleton, R.A., 455; Major Chester William, 537, 559; Robert Edward, 445 n. 18, 563; Robert Hilton, 559, 563, 568, 569; William Ansell, 558

Tollgate, Clifton Down, 188

Tolzey, see under Bristol: Merchants' Tolzey

Tombs' Dock, 151

Tomlinson, William, Havenmaster, 162, 318

Totnes, 80

Totterdown, 228

Touchet, Samuel, 135 and n. 56

Toulouse, 6

Towboat men, of Pill, 319

Towing, charges for, 319, 323; by steam, 302–3, 304, 316

Towing paths, 321

Town Dues, Bristol, SMV's views on, 288–9; attack on by Chamber of Commerce, 294; SMV's ambivalent attitude to, 296

Town Improvement Company, 424

Townsend, H., collector for SMV, 268–9

Tracy Park, Wick, 460, 461 n. 121

Trade and Mining School, Nelson Street, Bristol (later, Merchant Venturers' School), history of, 375–6; taken over by SMV, 376–8; other references, 359, 360, 372, 374, 382, 383, 387, 479, 484, 544

Tramways, 441

Trees, planting on Downs, 427, 428, 429, 433

Triangle, the, Bristol, 332

Triangle Hall, Park Place, 538

Trigg, K. H., Chief Clerk to SMV, 453, 475

Trinity House, 167, 168 and n. 117, 223, 317, 324, 325 n. 132, 326 and n. 140, 327

Trinity House, Kingston-upon-Hull, 198 n. 3

Tripoli, 79

Trippet, goodwife, 83

Trump, Arthur J., accountant to SMV, 453, 454

Trym Mills, 151

Tucker, Benjamin, 335; Josiah, 220 n. 11

Tucket, Elinor, housekeeper to SMV, 270

Tulley, George, 199

Tunis, 79

Turkey, 37

Turkey Company, see Levant Company

Turkish corsairs, 78–9, 86, 221; prisoners of, 83

Turner, William, 119; Mr., 370

Turnpikes, 187–8, 227, 228, 351, 430

Tutton, Mrs. Jane, lessee of the Hotwell, 350

Twerton, 207

Tyhurst, P. E., Land Steward to SMV, 456 and n. 87

Tyndale, John, 64 n. 58; Thomas, 107 n. 35

Tyndall, George, 189, 194; Thomas, 118, 225; Miss, 457–8

Tyndall's Park, new church in, 437

Tyre, 96

Tytherington, Gloucestershire, 229

Underdown, Dr. P. T., 128 and n. 17

Union Club, see under Bristol

Unity Street, Bristol, 376, 377, 380, 478, 480, 482, 484 n. 39, 494, 496, 500, 507, 510

University of Bath, 484, 511

University of Bristol, SMV and the foundation of, 491–510; SMV provides home for Faculty of Engineering of, 478; relations of SMV with, 484, 509, 510 and n. 151, 509, 512; other references, 447, 458, 472, 478, 480, 483, 519, 529. See also University College, Bristol

University College, Bristol, dispute with MVTC concerning overlapping, 382–4; other references, 265, 380, 381, 451, 477, 479, 492, 503. See also University of Bristol.
University College Colston Society, 491, 498
University College, Liverpool, 379 n. 114
University College, London, 498
University Grants Committee, 483, 531
Upper Park Street, Bristol, 342 n. 93

Vanes, Dr. Jean, 17 n. 20, 19 n. 30
Vassall, H. G., Clerk to SMV 1919–1938, 456–7
Vaughan, Charles, 417 n. 65; John, 547; Richard, 547
Vawer, William, 23
Venice, 56, 68
Verdon-Smith, Sir William Reginald, 563, 572
Vicary, Mr., evangelist, 438
Vick, William, legacy to build bridge over the Avon, 115, 245, 303–4, 434, 542
Vickerman, Mr., surveyor, 158
Vickris, Richard, 275
Victoria, Queen, Addresses to, 410–412; portrait in the Hall, 276, 458 and n. 106, 530; visit to Bristol of, 413; funeral procession of, 529
Victoria Rooms, 509
Victoria Square, building of, 336–341; expenditure on, 280; land for parsonage house in, 437; other references, 333, 467
Victoria Square gardens, 469, 472–474, 473 n. 58
Victoria Street, Bristol, 538
Vining, John, 251 n. 15, 551 n. 3
Vintners Company, London, 66, 67
Virginia, 68, 69, 81, 85, 131 n. 34, 135, 136, 141, 142, 201
Visger, Harman, 250
Vizer, Robert, 547, 548; Robert Willis, 548
Vyvyan, Sir Richard Rawlinson, M.P., 274

Wade estate, 518 n. 26
Wait, Hamilton Wilfrid Killigrew, 558, 568
Walbridge, near Stroud, 230
Waldegrave, 12th Earl, 563
Wales, 26, 92, 93, 177, 207, 390, 441
Wall, Christopher, Master of SMV school, 215
Wallace, Mr., Parliamentary Commissioner on Excise, 299
Walpole, Sir Robert, 219
Walsingham, Sir Francis, 21
War Bonds, 538
War Damage Commission, 462, 463, 522
War Savings Committee, 534
Ward, Charles, Clerk to SMV, 263, 264; Charles Edward, Clerk to SMV, 267 n. 109; Danvers Hill, 550; Sir I. G., Prime Minister of New Zealand, 530; Richard Brickdale, 370; William Welsford, see separate entry; Mr., 436
Ward, William Welsford, Treasurer to SMV 1918–32, appointment and biographical details of, 450–2; role in negotiations over University of Bristol, 493–509; work for St. Monica's, 517, 518 n. 8; and SMV Education Trust, 479; road and avenue named after, 470; views on role of SMV, 545; other references, 253 n. 25, 381 n. 124, 382, 383 nn. 130, 134, 384, 454–5, 492 n. 80, 494 nn. 84, 85, 514 and n. 3, 557, 573
Wardens, of the merchants in 1467, 5
Wards, Court of, 63
Warner, of arrival of ships, 76, 319
Warr, Eliza, housekeeper to SMV, 270
Warren, Sir Herbert, 446, 560
Warwick, 230
Water Bailiff, 181
Water Street, 481
Water supply, in Bristol, 30–1, 413 ff. See Waterworks scheme
Waterloo, 406
Watermen, of Pill, 319, 320
Waterworks scheme, of SMV, 413–426; plans for 1836, 414–15; plan and bill concerning, 1841, 415–16; new proposal 1842, 416–17; Committee report on, 1843, 417–18; report and plans 1844, 418–19; decision to proceed with, 1845, 419; rival scheme put forward by

Bristol Waterworks Company, 419–20; two bills before Parliament, 421–2; SMV extend its bill to cover whole of Bristol, 422; criticism of SMV by press, 423–4; SMV bill rejected, 424–5; compensation for work already carried out, 425–6
Wax, ordinance of 1467 concerning, 5
Weare, Mr., 219
Weeks, Philip, 348
Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, Duke of, 273 n. 151, 406, 407, 549
Welsford Avenue, Stapleton, 470
Welsford Road, Stapleton, 470
Welsh butter, patent to export, 66, 68
Wertheimer, Julius, Principal of Merchant Venturers Technical College, career of, 379 and n. 114; negotiations over overlap with University College, Bristol, 382–4; negotiations concerning University of Bristol, 492 and n. 80, 493, 494, 495 and n. 92, 496 and n. 94, 497, 500 n. 106, 505, 506, 507 and nn. 130, 131, 508; and the fire in MVTC, 477; first Dean of Faculty of Engineering, 478; death, 479–80; other references, 378 n. 10, 381 n. 124, 512; Mrs., 479 n. 20
West, Edith, tenant of Observatory, 474–5; William, founder of Observatory, 427, 428; Mr., portrait painter, 264
West of England Sanatorium, 392, 526
West of England University, proposed, 492
West of England University and Technical College, proposed, 382, 384
West India Club, 237, 238 n. 2
West India Committee, London, 136
West India Company, proposed, 293
West India Dock, London, 161
West India Society, work of and relations with SMV, 291–4; other references, 237–8, 238 n. 2, 284
West Indies, packets for, 227; pirates of, 221; SMV and, 293–4; trade with, 38, 93, 125, 135–6, 138–9, 261–2, 285, 287, 292; other references, 68, 140
Westbury-on-Trym, 187 n. 39, 228, 416, 421, 513, 515
Westbury-on-Trym Cricket Club, 520
Westcott, Commander John, 201
Western Daily Press, 452 n. 51, 472, 500 n. 106
Westgate, Gloucester, 228
Westgate Bridge, Gloucester, 228
Westmorland, Earl of, 106
Weston-super-Mare, 255, 264, 392
Westwardmen, of Pill, 319
Wexford, 80, 396
Weymouth, 80
Whipp, William, schoolmaster to SMV, 216
Wharfage duties, wharfage lease, origin of duty and informal acquisition by SMV, 71–2; government investigation of in 1637, 64–5; lease of in 1661 and increase in duties, 73; lease of in 1712, 150; negotiations and grant of new lease in 1764, 152–3, 241; resistance to and question of legality, 163–4; Act of Parliament legalising, 1807, 310 and n. 22; criticisms of SMV's part in, 246, 295, 300–2, 311; income from, 72, 74, 114, 280; history of in 19C. and pressure on SMV to surrender, 310–13, 321; anxiety of SMV about financial consequences of surrender, 279; surrender of lease 1861, 313, 321; subsequent criticisms of SMV's part in, 310, 423, 429
Whitaker, Miss Doris, personal assistant to Secretary of St. Monica's, 515 n. 8
Whitaker, Miss G. E., career with SMV, 454–5; portrait of in the Hall, 455; role during air-raids on Hall and Almshouse, 459, 460 n. 118; and the Merchant Venturers' Technical College, 482 n. 30, 484; and St. Monica's, 514 n. 3, 515 n. 8; appreciation of W. W. Ward by, 452 n. 51
Whitchurch, James, 163, 295 n. 54; James Joseph, 548; Samuel, senior, 547; Samuel, Treasurer of SMV, 260, 548

White, Whyt, George, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27; Giles, feoffee 1561, 18 and n. 18; Thomas, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27

White Hart Inn, Bristol, 29

White Lion Inn, 29, 160, 415 n. 56

Whitehead, Thomas, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 27; see also Dean, Whitehead and Co.

Whiteladies Gate, Bristol, 187

Whiteladies Road, Bristol, 187, 188, 437

Whiteladies Spring, 414 n. 48

Whiteladies Turnpike, 186

Whitson, John, feoffee 1600, 19 n. 20, 23, 27, 30, 55, 275

Whitson Court, sugar house, 33 n. 32

Whittal, George Piercy, 552

Whitwill, Mark, junior, 564, 572

Wick, 460

Wicken Estate, 518 n. 26

Wigram, Sir Clive, 560 n. 9

Wilberforce, William, 138

Wilbraham, Mr., lawyer, 110 n. 55

Wilcox, Jack Eugene David, 564

Wilde, Oscar, 451 and n. 48

Wilkins, George, 19 n. 27; the Rev. H. J., 519–20; the Rev. Richard, 235

William III, 197, 232, 234

William IV, 271, 409, 410

Williams, William, schoolmaster, 217; Mr., 161; Mrs., 204

Willoughby, Christopher, Treasurer to SMV, 106, 148

Wills, Lt. Commander Alan Oliver, 531, 563, 571; E. D., 392 n. 61; Frank Oliver, 562, 570; Sir Frederick, 492; Frederick Anthony Hamilton, see Dulverton, 2nd baron; George Alfred, 446, 458, 541, 560; George Vernon Proctor, 561, 564, 569 and n. 2; Gilbert Alan Hamilton, see Dulverton, 1st Baron; Henry Herbert, 276, 446, 465, 513, 514, 515, 517, 545, 561; Henry Overton, 1786, 92; Henry Overton, 392 n. 61, 498; Sir John Vernon, 564; Dame Mary Monica Cunliffe, 513 and n. 2, 514 and n. 4, 515, 517; W. D., Chairman of Marine Society, 358; W. H., 392 n. 61; W. Melville, 447, 561; family, 384, 494, 513–14

Wilson, Charles, 37; Renn Hampden, 556; Mrs., 120

Wilstar, John Jacob de, survey of Clifton by, 183 and n. 6; plans of for Seamen's Hospital, 199, 200

Wiltshire, 230, 373, 500, 514

Windmill, Clifton Down, building of, 196 and n. 103; used for grinding corn for poor, 208; used as toolshed, 427. For its later history, see Observatory

Windmill Hill, Clifton, 415

Windsor Castle, 269

Windsor Terrace, Clifton, 331

Wine, 2, 5 n. 15, 8 n. 23, 63, 66–7, 69, 87, 144, 285

Winford Orthopaedic Hospital for Sick Children, 530, 541

Winnington, Laurence, with Sir Ralph Sadleir, grants property of gild of Mariners to feoffees of the merchants, 17 and n. 22

Winterhalter, copies of portraits of Victoria and Albert by, 276, 458 and n. 106, 530

Winterstoke, Lord, 492

Withy Bed, Clifton, 109, 184

Woad, 5 and nn. 15, 16, 6

Woburn Place, 342 n. 93

Wolf Rocks, 168

Woodward, Edward Hamilton Everard, 559; Col. John Henry, Treasurer SMV 1914–18, 556, 559, 573

Wool, John, 91

Wool oil, 5 and n. 15

Wootton and Dorton Estate, 518 n. 26

Worcester, 231

Worle, Somerset, 389

Worrall, Samuel, Clerk to SMV, 106–7, 108–9, 116, 120, 133 and n. 47, 163, 185, 202, 203, 233, 334; Samuel, 417 n. 65, 431; Worrall family, 329; Messrs. Worrall, 343

Worrall Road, Clifton, 107

Wraxall, 119

Wraxall, Nathaniel, 126

Wrecks, law concerning, 222

Wrenmore, Somerset, 354 n. 189

Wrigley's chewing gum, 462

Writing School, of SMV, see under Society of Merchant Venturers: School, for poor mariners' children

Wyld, John Hopton, 251; William Hopton, 552
Wyndham House, Kingsdown, used for primary department of Merchant Venturers' Technical College, 478

Yalland, John, builder, 340, 341
Yarmouth, 128
Yarn, 135
Yate, Robert, 88, 131
Yeamans, Sir Robert, 87
York, 12, 25, 27, 57
York Buildings, 335, 467
York Place, 335
Younge, Yong, Richard, feoffee 1561 and 1600, 18 n. 23, 19; William, feoffee 1561, 18 n. 23
Ypres, 537

Zante, 55, 56
Zealand, 42
Zig-zag Path, Clifton, 352, 474